

# Solitary Island...

A STORY OF .. ..  
THE ST. LAWRENCE

BY  
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"BROTHER AZARIAS," "A WOMAN OF CULTURE,"  
"HIS HONOR THE MAYOR," "SARANAC," ETC.

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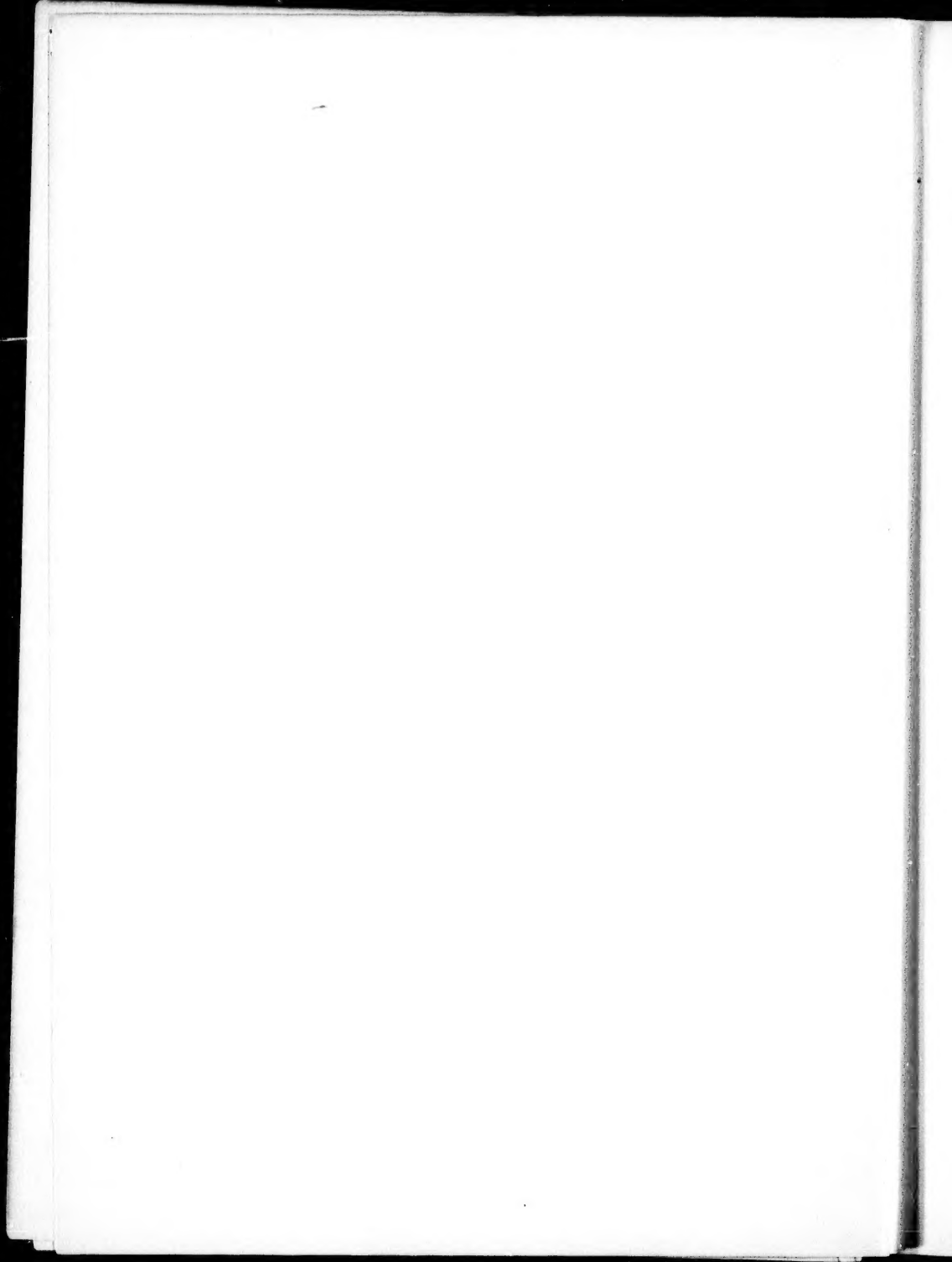
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# SOLITARY ISLAND.

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## CHAPTER I.

### FLIGHT!

AMONG the beautiful islands in that wonderful cluster at the source of the river St. Lawrence is one noticeable for its petty size and peculiar shape. It covers a quarter of an acre, perhaps, and lying at the foot of a sister island some seven miles long, would never attract visitors but for its shape and its excellent view of the village of Clayburgh. Smaller islands, mere rocky stars on the watery blue, crowd about it, and shut it out from the sight of approaching travelers; but, arching its back from the water like a bow, and throwing into the air a natural pyramid of moss-eaten graystone, it offers a summit high above its sisters. Nature has provided a stairway to the platform above, and a stunted tree clinging there welcomes the sightseer with scanty shade.

Here, on a day of early September, sat a man quietly looking upon the splendid view before him. The sun was swinging close to the Canadian horizon, and Clayburgh was crimsoned with its autumn glory. The water was on fire. With every ripple and wave

red sparks and flames seemed to shoot into the air, the smoky woods lending to the illusion. It was neither chilly nor warm. A pleasant mean prevailed in the air, and so softly did the colors of dying day blend with those of the coming night that he who sat there was unmindful of the passing hours. His gaze wandered from one feature of the scene to another, and its placidity was reflected in the repose of his body, in his gentle breathing, and in the pensive expression of his face. His general appearance was not that of one gifted with many of the finer human instincts. A blue shirt, gray breeches, undressed shoes, cap and leggings, all of very coarse material, made up his costume; his skin was toughened and browned by years of exposure, and a curly red beard covered the lower part of the face. The rifle at his side, and the fishing tackle in his canoe indicated the sportsman. Yet there was more about him, as there is about every man, than even second glances would discover. His light hair and red beard were of a very fine texture, his hands were shapely, his features delicately cut, and his blue eyes, if a little too keen in their glance, were sympathetic and expressive; but his skin cap hid hair and face, and tanned complexion and rough costume hid much more from curious eyes. As he looked at the distant village bathed in sunset fire he muttered to himself, and not seldom the unheeded tears fell down his cheek.

“Ah, friend Scott, dreaming, hey?”

A rough voice came from below, where a fat, half-naked man was just rising from the water.

Scott looked down quietly.

"You had quite a swim of it, Pen'l'ton," he said, without moving. "Thought you couldn't hev got here for a good hour yet."

"The devil!" growled Pendleton, shaking himself like a dog and swinging his naked arms to take off the chill. "You're a nice man, to allow me to swim all the way, and your boat so handy! I'm chilled through. Why didn't you shout when you saw me coming?"

"Didn't know you were comin' till I saw you half-way over, Squire. Did you want to see me?"

"Did I want to see you?" sneered the Squire as he rummaged the canoe. "No; I want to see your whiskey bottle—haven't any, confound ye! I'm a likely man to leave my clothes on the island and swim this far, and do it all for nothing. Look at me," he said, as he began to mount the natural steps, "and ask that question again."

"It's a strange fix for you, Pen'l'ton," said Scott, amused. "You're not runnin' away from the law, maybe?"

"Yes, I am running away from the law," answered the Squire, shaking his fist at Clayburgh. "Blame 'em! they haven't left me a place this side of France or South America to hide in. They are after my head, man; they've offered a reward—to any man, woman, child or jackass that will present 'em with me, dead or alive, or with my head."

"I heard somethin'——" began the hunter.

"Of course you did. Ther' all talking about it—about the fool Pendleton, who sided with Mackenzie, another fool, and helped him to get justice for Canadians, and now has two governments after him.

Well, I'm the man, and I've come to you for help; nobody else wants to give it."

"I'm glad you lit on me, Squire," Scott began again.

"Oh! are you?" sneered the Squire, nettled by the tone. "Wait till you hear the whole of it. 'Any man who harbors, assists, feeds, etc., Squire Pendleton goes to jail along with him when he's caught.' How do you like that, hey?"

Scott was silent and turned his gaze in the direction of the town, whose spires alone now caught the reflection of the sun's last rays. Pendleton evidently did not expect this action on the hunter's part, and he grew uneasy and angry. A half-sigh escaped him, for his position was really one of peril, and there were others interested in his fate whom his capture would affect bitterly.

"I don't wish to bring any one into trouble, Scott," he hastened to say, "and I'm not going to do it for you. But knowing these islands as you do, I thought you could show me some hiding-place that would give me refuge until I can leave the country. For they'll not catch me—no, not if I have to swim to the Bay of Biscay."

There was no answer from Scott, and his thoughts seemed to be miles away from the Squire's affairs. Pendleton stood for a moment irresolute, and then hastily descended the steps and jumped into the canoe.

"You're like the rest," he murmured. "There's not a man among the whole crew. Well, you can meditate there for the rest of the night or swim for it. I'm going to make this my property." He attempted to cut the rope of the canoe, when by a

dexterous jerk Scott upset the boat and the Squire went into the water headlong. As he rose spluttering the hunter was engaged in rescuing his floating tackle.

"Foolin' with governments is dangerous," said he, "an' it's natural to think I don't want to get mixed up in your evil doin's. But then I'm not goin' back on ye, Squire, not if I know it, even though my head was concerned, which it isn't, for in this country they don't go quite so much on the head-choppin' as I've heard tell of in other countries. I kin find a place for ye, p'raps. It mayn't be much to your likin', for beds are scarce, an' furniture has to grow of itself thar. But you'll hev the sun to call ye at six o'clock, an' stars will see ye to bed and watch over ye all night along with the singin' o' the water. Squire, them's my comforts."

"They agree with you mightily," murmured Pendleton, who was now rather subdued. Having put his boat in order, Scott invited his companion to enter and was surprised to receive a cold and emphatic refusal.

"I've got a new idea from that ducking," he said gloomily, "and I'm going to follow it out. Good-bye; thanks for your offer." And he plunged into the water again, only to be pulled out almost roughly by a strong, impatient hand.

"This," said the Squire, purpling, "is——"

"Common sense—nothin' less, Pen'l'ton," was the firm, severe interruption. "Don't ye think I know more about this business of yours than to let you walk right smack into the hands of the officers? What'r you thinkin' of? What about Ruth?"

"Yes, yes, you're right," the other answered hastily. "I'm a fool. Poor Ruth! Go on. I'll go to the devil, if you say so."

Scott pointed to the boat, in which the Squire penitently took his seat.

"Shall we go for your clothes?"

"Let 'em stay there. If they think me drowned, so much the better."

Scott pushed off and took his course eastward. The sun had set, and heavy clouds had closed like prison-gates on his glories. A thin mist was rising from the marshy shores. The silence of coming night was scarcely disturbed by the dip of the paddle and the cry of the wild duck in the distance.

"They'll not see our course," Pendleton said, half to himself, "and Ruth will be satisfied. Poor Ruth!"

Scott did not hear him. His eyes were fixed, as usual, on the scenes around him, and reflected more than ever the emotions of his simple heart. These must have been very pleasant then, for his face was lit up by a happy smile.

## CHAPTER II.

### MARRIAGE.

ABOUT the hour which saw Squire Pendleton puffing through the chilly waters of the St. Lawrence, Clayburgh's young and rising lawyer sat in his office, wondering what had become of the chief figure in the social and political life of the village. The office window commanded a view of the river and its islands, and Mr. Wallace with the aid of a glass could have witnessed the scene between the Squire and the friendly fisherman. But his thoughts were just then given to himself. He had a bright future before him, and he was surveying it with the enchanted telescope of the mind. His youthful history had not one cloud, not one error, not one ill-success in it. Everything he had done from childhood up had been done well. His townsmen flattered him, and took pride in his abilities. His family adored him. Good offers were made to him by legal firms in the larger cities, but work in his native village was plentiful and profitable, if not suited to develop a great mind. All his affairs were in good condition. He had health, strength, money, and good looks. His personal gifts were numerous, and not all of them were known even to himself. He was generous, yet cool-minded and prudent; passionate, yet thoroughly self-ruled. He had given his heart to the keeping of



Squire Pendleton's daughter, and she had accepted the trust almost, and half-promised to become his wife. Once they were married he would go to New York, and settling down to hard work would aim for the very highest things that a man might attain to in a life-time. What they were he hardly knew; but the path of sunlit water, which lay before him as far as he could see, was not so rosy as the path of glory along which his dreams conducted him to the pinnacle of fame. It intoxicated him to think of these things. He thought it a sign of his secret and untried ability that he could dream so, whereas it was only the product of a good and young constitution, an ambitious soul, and an overpowering vanity.

"Not one trouble in the world," said Florian, "and not one obstacle in sight that amounts to anything. I am a lucky man."

Yet, just at that moment, so rosy, so hopeful, his ill-luck gave a soft, imperative tap at the office door.

"Come in," said Florian.

The parish priest entered, Florian's friend and second father, who took as much pride in the boy,—and more perhaps,—as any good father would. For he had trained him in childhood, and guided his young manhood, and it was from him that Florian had learned his severe adhesion to religious principle, and strict literary tastes. His short, stout body was dressed in a clerical costume of the time, his face clean shaven, rosy in color, and very reserved in expression. There was no asceticism in his appearance. His manners were brusque. He said little, and smiled rarely, but in all that he did and said and looked there was that odd, indefinable something

which proclaims a man who differs from the majority of men.

"No news of the Squire," said Père Rougevin.

"Not a word," replied Florian. "I have no doubt if we let him alone, or if the government detectives go away he will come back soon enough. His rheumatism is not the sort of baggage for a political exile."

"Miss Ruth is anxious about him."

"No doubt, no doubt, but there is little need for anxiety. If there were——"

He hesitated and the priest added :

"You would make things fly to settle her fears. How does the New York idea develop?"

"So, so, father," said Florian. "Let us say two months from now, for the finish."

And he went on to picture the results leading up to his departure, until he saw the ambiguous smile which touched the priest's lips and instantly faded.

"Well," said he, "what do you smile at? Do you think me too hopeful?"

"There are no hindrances in your way?" said the priest, in a questioning tone.

"Well, none that I can see."

There was a moment's silence, and the priest walked to the window as if he had dismissed the subject.

"Are you going home to supper?" he said.

"Now I am sure," interrupted Florian, "that you see something in the way, if I don't, and I must ask you, Père Rougevin, to tell me of it."

"I thought you knew all worth knowing concern-

ing your own affairs.—But then, you are quite certain of Ruth's conversion to the faith?"

"Ah!" said Florian, struck dumb with a sudden fear.

"I can say no more," the priest went on. "I have known Miss Pendleton since she was a child. She has been brought up loosely in matters of religion, but her tastes and feelings are religious. She knows something about us, and is quite used to our ways. She is very conscientious. I cannot say that she takes to Catholicity."

It was a long speech for the priest to make, and he at once dismissed the entire matter by taking up another subject of conversation. But Florian was really frightened.

"Père," said he, "I can't think or talk of anything but what you have just told me. When *you* speak of a thing there is always something to it. What am I to do? I'm not a fool. I cannot live without Ruth. I do not believe in mixed marriages. But it would be as bitter as death to give her up just when I had made myself believe it was all right."

"One should not make himself believe it was all right," said the priest.

"I know, I know," the lawyer impatiently answered. "But how many are so careful as that. Ruth and I were brought up together. I am sure she has a high regard for me——"

"You do well to put it that way."

"What! you think she has no other feeling for me but regard?"

The priest shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah!" said Florian, "if it be true that she can-

not in conscience become a Catholic, then it's all over between us. But I am not going to believe that. I will see for myself. I cannot believe it."

"Do," said Père Rougevin. "It will be better for you."

And hastily bidding the young lawyer good-day he went out quickly. Florian knitted his brows and fell to thinking. It was not safe to have too rosy a future to dream on. Ten minutes ago he could not find an obstacle in his path, and now Ruth was on the very point of departing from him. He was bound not to give her up easily. The young man was practical in his love as in his business. He had not that abandonment of feeling which brooks no possible danger of losing the object of his feeling. He knew that death, or conscience, or a change of heart might at any moment step between him and the woman he loved, and so he did not say, "I shall never give her up," but instead, "I shall not give her up easily,"—a good and prudent restriction to put upon his determination. He sat thinking until the sun disappeared behind the islands, and then it occurred to him that this new and unexpected trouble which had come upon him would surely be followed by others. "It never rains but it pours." It would be a good thing to see Ruth at once, and have an understanding with her that would prove the Père mistaken, and it might keep off other troubles. He seized his hat, when a second knock sounded on the door. For a moment he was tempted to jump out of the window; then smiling at his own fancies he bade the visitor enter. The Rev. Dunstan Buck was not a

visitor or client of Florian's, and therefore he did not wonder at the slight start which the lawyer gave on seeing him. The young man was not so much surprised at his visit as at the circumstance of two clergymen following each other into his office. Mr. Buck was invited to a seat, and took it nervously. His over-elegant appearance made the little office look dingy, for as the minister of a very High Church congregation, he found it necessary to look and dress as if every moment had seen him put on a new suit, bathe, shave, and say prayers. He was for all that a gentle-minded and good-hearted man.

"I may have made a blunder in coming to you," he began with his glasses fixed on the lawyer, "but I really did not see to what member of the family I could address myself. Your father, unhappily, does not take to the town ministers, and I am aware that Catholics are very strict about these things, but in short, Mr. Wallace, I have a high esteem for your sister Sara, and I would like to pay her my addresses."

The lawyer's response was prompt and nicely-worded, but the surprise he felt could not be put into words.

"Has Miss Wallace any suspicion of your feelings towards her?" he asked.

"I told her that I intended to speak to you," said the minister. "She made no serious objections, but seemed to dread it."

"Of course, her own wishes are the chief thing to be looked at," replied Florian. "But I may as well warn you, Mr. Buck, that you are going to meet with bitter opposition. Father and mother, Père

Rougevin, my sister Linda and myself cannot favor you at all. You know very well that my sister will become a Protestant in marrying you, something which no Catholic can think of with pleasure. At the same time, I am sure your conduct in doing nothing secretly is that of a gentleman. But I wish I could persuade you to look elsewhere for a wife."

Mr. Buck was silent for a moment. "I cannot promise you," he said. "I hoped that perhaps you might persuade your family——"

"This is the situation, Mr. Buck," Florian politely broke in. "You know my father. If he thought you were courting Miss Sara, your life and hers would be made miserable and notorious in the village. I could not change him even if I would."

Rev. Mr. Buck rose hastily.

"I see,—I understand," he said. "I wished to do everything honorably. You will not blame me if anything should occur contrary to your wishes."

"Certainly not. I am greatly obliged by your candor," said Florian as he bowed him out; "but I'll take good care that nothing occurs contrary to those wishes," he added when his visitor was gone, leaving a faint scent of the perfume bottle in the air. Supper that evening in the Wallace dining-room was a dull, even threatening affair. When it was finished Sara at a sign from her brother followed him into the little room he called his study. One window only admitted the light, and had painted on its narrow panes a waterview, with pine-fringed islands and the north-west sky for a background. Florian motioned his sister to a chair. She was pale but calm and obstinate-looking. Her face had

set itself in a cold, hard expression which did not daunt the youth, but rendered him uneasy.

"I was a little surprised to-day——" he began.

"You always are," she retorted, without looking at him.

"To have a visit from Mr. Buck. It seemed to be understood that Mr. Buck was an accepted suitor of yours, and that before long matrimony would make a convert to Protestantism where conviction could not."

"Well, what of it? Is Mr. Buck less a gentleman because he is a minister——"

"Excuse me if I do not argue that point," her brother interrupted. "Mr. Buck is a gentleman, though a little shallow and sometimes silly. What I desire to know is, have you given any reason to others to talk of you in this way?"

"And if I have, am I bound to tell you of it?"

"You misunderstand me, Sara," he said gently. "I am not your master, but your brother, and I ask the question, not because you are bound to answer it, but because it will be better for you to do so."

"Well, people will talk," she replied lightly. "I have never given him the slightest encouragement."

"Why, then, should he come to me?" Florian persisted. "Are you sure that you have not even thought of encouraging him. May not some of your actions which you thought light and unmeaning have given him reason to think——"

"I won't answer any more," she said, bridling. "Why, one would think I was in a witness-box, sworn to tell my every thought to you. It's worse than the Inquisition?"

"Than the Inquisition!" repeated Florian in astonishment. "Perhaps it might be worse than that, if the matter comes to father's ears."

Sara's lips quivered at this implied threat, and the tears filled her eyes. They were tears of spite, not of grief.

"You are mean enough to tell him," and her voice trembled despite her pride. "I am persecuted everywhere. No one seems to care for me."

"It is just because we care for you, all of us, that we trouble you so much. Is it no pain to us that you should marry a Protestant minister and be lost to the faith?"

She broke into fitful sobbing. Florian walked to the window and looked out gloomily on the scene. She dried her eyes at length, and proceeded from tears to frowns.

"I won't stand this persecution any longer," she said rising. "You may tell every one, you may tell the wrinkled old bore yonder"—she alluded to her father—"you may tell the world; but I shall do as I please, and if you attempt any more of this I have at least one refuge open to me."

"Then it is true," said her brother, with ominous quiet in his voice.

"You can believe it, if you wish to," and she attempted to leave the room, but he stood between her and the door, with so stern a face that she grew frightened again.

"You must remember," he said, "that this is no child's play, and that until you satisfy me one way or another as to what you have done in this matter your life will be twice as unpleasant as you say it



has been. Your father shall know of it at once, the priest shall hear it as soon as may be, and Mr. Buck shall receive a warning. Now you can take your choice—make a clean breast of what you know or prepare to suffer.”

She walked over to the window for a moment and burst out weeping again. Her brother, stern as he looked, felt a sudden pang and sighed.

“It is true,” he thought, “and, worse than all, she cares for him.”

There was a long silence until Sara had dried her tears once more and was calm enough to speak. Her first words showed that she had become reasonable.

“You make me suffer for nothing,” she said.

“I suffer myself much more,” he replied. “You are too dear to me that I should look on you throwing yourself into an abyss, and not feel troubled. Have you no pity for us who love you? Do you not know that our grief would be less hopeless, less keen, to see you dead than to see you the wife of this man? Dead, you would be still ours; living and his wife, our separation would be eternal. Sara, think for a moment and you will see your folly.”

“I haven’t been guilty of any folly. Mr. Buck was foolish enough to pay his addresses to me, but I never encouraged him, never responded even. And, since you wish it, I’ll not look at him again.”

“Thank you,” said Florian, but he was not at all satisfied. Sara thought that her last speech was exceedingly frank, and truthful enough in appearance to deceive her brother, but her face was not reassur-

ing. He saw no sincerity there, only the assumption of sincerity, and went away sad, to join Linda outside, while Sara, after making a face at him as he retired, hurried away to her own room and a new novel. Linda was standing where the sun could fall on her face through a veil of green leaves, and peering down on the river.

"Well," said Linda, "what did she say?"

"Nothing; neither admitted nor denied, but fussed a good deal, wept and defied me, and wound up by declaring that she was innocent and would never do it again."

"I wish we could believe her."

"And don't you?" he said reproachfully.

"I am sorry to think I do not. Sara is not very truthful. While you are here it may do very well; when you are gone——"

"I am not gone yet," he said when she hesitated.

"This incident may hinder your going. I hope it will. I would be tempted to favor Mr. Buck, if it would."

"Be reasonable, child. We must all part one day, and why not now, when health and youth belong to us? Separation is to be expected, and has happened to so many families that we should not wonder if it happens to ours."

"No one wonders; one only grieves. I know just what thoughts actuate you, Florian, and they astonish me. You are too ambitious."

"It is 'the failing of great minds,'" he quoted, smiling. She shook her head sadly and turned her eyes on the river, now dusky under twilight's shadow.

"Look at it," she said. "What a fine spot to live and die in."

"Sometimes I have thought it too," he replied musingly. "I know every feature of the place so well, and the idea of living sixty quiet years among the same scenes is pleasing. What a placid face, what an untroubled heart, an old man would have after six decades! He would naturally graduate into eternity then. A dream! Impossible! The soul was made for action. I couldn't think of it."

He jumped up in his eagerness, and noticed that his sister had burst into tears. The next moment she laughed.

"That is the end of it, Florian. You have pronounced the separation of our family: you to politics, Sara to Mr. Buck, and myself to——"

"The prince, of course; and you will find that such changes, though bitter, leave a honey in their wound. Come, get your cloak and hat, and we shall walk."

Linda was glad to hide her confusion at his last words, and ran away to prepare herself.

"I wonder," she said, as they went down the hill to the bay, "that Sara did not think of throwing Ruth Pendleton at you in reproaching her for encouraging Mr. Buck."

"It is a wonder," replied Florian; "she is so—well, she knows I would not marry Ruth if there was not a prospect of her conversion."

"And wouldn't you?"

"Why do you ask that question, Linda?" he said, looking down at her serious face.

"I thought, you know—that is, I heard you extol

the power of love so often, and—well, the thought doesn't come to me. I mean wouldn't it hurt you a *little* to give her up——”

“If she didn't become a Catholic after all? Yes, it *would* hurt me.”

They walked along in silence for a time.

“Ruth is so Quakerish, so thoughtful, and so determined,” said Linda. “If she couldn't feel convinced, she wouldn't become a Catholic—not for twenty Florians.”

“Her highest praise, that. I would never have given her my heart otherwise. If my wife is to be a Catholic she shall be a good one.”

“But just think, Florian, if she didn't believe!”

“You are bound to think disagreeable things to-night,” he said laughing, “but let us work on the *if*. In that case Ruth and I would part and there would be an end to it.”

“A cool description of a hot affair,” she said.

“Do you know, the Père gave me a fright on this matter not more than two hours past. He thinks Ruth will not become a Catholic.”

“It has often occurred to me,” she replied with spirit; “nor would I, were I a Protestant, for the sake of getting a husband.”

The next minute she laughed at his indignant face, and made an apology.

“No, no, Flory, you may be sure I did not mean that. Ruth has too good a heart, too strong a principle to do such a silly thing. She's in trouble now over her poor father. You ought to go and comfort her.”

He was not very enthusiastic in taking the offer,

but at all events he must know something definite about her change of religious convictions before that night passed.

"I think I will go," he said. They were standing on the river shore, and his boat lay ready a few feet away. Linda pushed him into it.

"Try to make her promise to-night," she said, as he rowed off, "and here's good luck to you."

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE ISLAND.

SQUIRE PENDLETON's dwelling stood a mile from the village on the south side of the bay, and was the first object which he saw that afternoon from the little island. The mistress of the house, at the same moment that her father looked with moist eyes upon his home, was pacing sadly the veranda which ran along the east side of the building; while Florian was listening to the priest's painful remarks about her religious inclinations she was still restlessly walking there; and yet later, when Linda urged her brother to visit her and he had put off from the shore, she had not left the veranda nor lost her nervousness. She had been in deep trouble ever since her father had been involved in the unlucky rebellion. His night-and-day journeying to escape the officers, the exposure which an old man must suffer from considerably, the accidents which might happen to him, kept her in a state of nervous dread.

Miss Pendleton was a very womanly young creature, of an original turn of mind, and a very plain address. The best point in her character was, she thought very little of herself. While her father was hurried on by the devil of delusion and Florian was racked at the thought of losing her, and Linda wept over the chance of her non-conversion, she alone

thought of nothing but the foolish father taking his risks of exposure and consequent sickness. She had a single eye for her duty, and the truth. Her own risks did not present themselves to her consideration. It was this one quality that had won for Ruth the tender love of Linda, the regard of Père Rougevin, and the devotion of Florian.

It happened at the same time that she was well read and clever, that her complexion was good and her eyes large and expressive, and that she had matronly ideas as to a young woman's dress, speech, and behavior. The habit of ruling the Squire, and looking after him had made her a responsible being. She was the mother of her own household at sixteen, and could have ruled and guided many a one as old as herself. Florian had reason to be troubled over the prospect of losing her. She loved the truth, and seemed to have little trouble in following it. He often smiled as he thought with what gentle but final persistence Ruth would push him and the whole world aside if they stood between her and the truth.

Thinking of these things as he rowed across the bay he finally lost courage. He would not press her to a final decision that night. A little strategy and tact ought to be used even with so sincere a woman. A soft wind was rising, and the mist that floated on the water was shaken apart to let the stars shine through. Growing stronger it made great rents in the mist, which remained open long enough to show the dark mass of an island and the lights on shore.

"I am so glad you have come!" cried a soft voice from the shore, almost before he touched it. He

jumped out, drew up the boat, and clasped the hand outstretched to him.

"You are always so, Ruth," he said, with some reserve in his tones. "What's the trouble?"

"I have heard from my father," she said.

"And his head is on his shoulders still, and no one has the reward?" murmured Florian regretfully.

"Scott, that queer hunter, came to me after sundown," Ruth began, "and told me that my father was hiding in a cave among the islands, and was anxious that I should send him some money. Scott was to bring it, but I told him——"

"That you would get me to do it instead," Florian interrupted, "and bring him some news and help him to get out of the country."

"Not at all," said Ruth, "but that I would go myself, for I know how he wishes to see me."

"Oh! it is to be a night adventure," said Florian. The fog was gone and the wind was freshening rapidly. Dull clouds obscured the sky, but the faint starlight, shining down in broken beams, showed ugly white caps playing across the black waters.

"It will be a rough night——"

"Ah! but we shall not be out all night," said Ruth, "and for an hour this wind will be no stronger. But we must not delay, and I must get over to-night."

"Well, wrap up and we are off."

He got the boat ready, a common yacht of ordinary size, and presently they pushed off, and in an instant were scudding like birds over the angry bay. In fact, the wind was almost too much for the vessel, as some wild seas, which partly drenched them,



plainly showed. Sometimes the waves which broke in their path found a lodging place in the boat ; and as they emerged from the channel into a broad bay where the shifting winds had full play, the little craft began to heave, and between altering their course and dodging seas they were a long time in getting to their destination. It was with great satisfaction Florian sailed under the lee of a pretty island not more than a mile distant from the Canadian shore.

"This is the place," said Ruth ; "we are to look for a projecting rock, a house, and a light."

"That is, you want Scott's oratory, hermitage, ranch, or whatever you please to call it," he replied.

"Cabin is a good word, for I fancy the hunter is not a man of much prayer."

"He ought to be, in this solitude." All at once a light and a rock burst upon their view, and the hunter himself stood on the shore to welcome them in the darkness. When Ruth and Florian had landed and the boat was safely anchored, he led them into a double-roomed cabin, such a hut as men of his class are accustomed to build—stout and serviceable, with a table and stools, a single window, a great fireplace heaped with logs—for the nights are chilly so near the water—fire-arms and fishing-tackle in profusion, a print or two, and a few well-thumbed books. There was nothing noticeable in the hut save its cleanliness, neatness, and wholesome smell, as if no more offensive intruders than sun, air, and good cookery ever found entrance.

"Make yourself quite at home," said the hermit, placing the single candle where it would afford the

most light. "Your paw is not here, Miss, but he'll be here right off as soon as I kin git to him. You, youngster, kin see to miss while I git her paw. He's not a thousand miles off, and if you want anything to eat thar's the door to the pantry."

This was quietly said, while Florian kept his keen eyes fastened on the speaker. For to him this hunter had always been a mystery because of his retired life and taciturn disposition. When he went out Florian began a minute examination of the whole place.

"Why are you so inquisitive?" said Ruth. "Have you another theory concerning this man?"

"No; but I wish to find one. He is an odd character and ought to have a history, a romance—something that will give the key to his present position. Whence came he? Was he crossed in love? Did he commit a never-to-be-forgotten crime? Has he friends?"

"Had he a father, had he a mother?" said Ruth, repeating all the delightful poem, while Florian examined and talked, and finally sat down disappointed.

"Not even a pencil-mark in these old works," he exclaimed, "nor a bit of writing anywhere, nor any indication of better days. Books on fishing and hunting; a cabin like all of its class; a man of fishy smell and look and speech—poor material to collect a romance from."

"Now, as to the look," said Ruth, "I fancy there is something poetic about him. His eyes are clear, blue as the sky, well-shaped, large but for bushy eyebrows. He has a fine head and beautiful hair, but that cap spoils or hides all."

"You are thinking of his magnificent surroundings," said Florian. "He looks well, because the image of him always carries this setting of nature. But matter rules this temple. There is no mind here."

"Father," murmured Ruth, slipping into her father's outstretched arms as that gentleman entered, followed by Scott. The hermit smiled on the scene till, looking at Florian, he seemed suddenly overcome, and shuffled into a corner.

"Florian, a thousand thanks," said the Squire, shaking hands violently with the youth, his face purple with emotion, restrained because the hermit had forbidden him to roar. "She is yours, and you will guard her when I'm far away on the billow."

"On your pillow?" cried Florian. "Why——"

"On the billow, sir!" said the Squire. "No tricks, sir; I can't stand 'em now. I mean, when I am sailing for sunny France, take care of her."

"I'll go with you," whimpered Ruth, beginning to cry and patting his white head.

"Ay, that's right," said the Squire. "Pat away. You may not know, my dear, how costly a piece of furniture that head of mine is now with two governments after it. You'll come with me? Not at all. You'll stay here with Florian and go to France on your bridal tour. I'll have a place for you. I'll be the thorn of those two rascally governments. I'll be lonely, I know, but I'll make up for it by fight. There, there, little girl, just sit down and get sensible again. You don't happen to have a pipe, Florian? This man here don't smoke—not enough fire in him for that."

Ruth made strenuous efforts to recover from a fit of sobbing, and her father lighted his pipe. Under its soothing influence he grew melancholy.

"When I'm in France, Florian——"

"But you're not there yet, sir, and we don't intend you shall go."

"You don't know the malice, the devilish what-d'ye-call-it, of these two governments. 'If we fail,' says Mackenzie to me, 'we're damned'—politically I mean. What's the use? I must go. I'm cut out for an exile; I feel it all over me, along with the rheumatism, since I began jiggling around these confounded islands. Hear that sigh? It attacks me regularly night and day."

Ruth smiled.

"That's right, dear," said he. "I know what you're thinking of—that it will take many sighs to make the old man give up the last one. They may search and persecute, but I won't lose a pound of flesh for 'em. No, sir!"

"What do you think, Scott?" said Florian to the hermit. "Isn't there some way to get the Squire out of this muddle?"

"Muddle, sir!" thundered the Squire in a crescendo which sank to a whisper at the warning gesture of Scott. "You mean revolution."

"I beg your pardon," said Florian, "revolution."

"There is but one way that I kin see," replied Scott modestly.

"You! What do you know about it?" said the Squire roughly. "Why, Florian, what can any one think of a man who says that it takes as much power in Almighty God to knock a thing into nothing

as it did to take it out of nothing? He says that and swears by it. Don't you, sir—don't you?"

"What I was thinking," said Scott, "this young man might go down to the Governor of the State and just settle the matter in a quiet way without much talk——"

"Certainly! That ends it—a boy settles a revolution."

"No, no, papa," said Ruth. "He means that Florian shall bear your submission——"

"I'll never submit! Well, go on."

"To the governor, and may be he will accept it, and you will not have to go so far away and leave me alone."

"That's the hardest part of it—leaving you, dear; but what can I do—what can I do?"

Scott beckoned to Florian, and they went outside.

"You see," said the hermit, "as far as I kin learn, this country ain't so much against the Squire as he thinks. It's my opinion that if some friend went to the governor and said, 'Here, thar ain't no earthly use in drivin' an old man out of his senses because the British lion is roarin'; s'posin' he gives hisself up, wouldn't the government kind o' parole him and let him stay at home while he keeps quiet?'—that would settle the hull business, *I think*."

"I think the same," said Florian. "We'll persuade him to give me the authority to treat for him, and you will be kind enough to keep him for a few days until I return."

"In course, in course; he's welcome as long as he stays."

"You have a nice place about here," said Florian, desiring to draw him out. "A little lonely, perhaps?"

"Somewhat, but I like it," answered the man simply. "I couldn't stay in your towns now, and there isn't another place in the world I'd exchange with just at this moment."

"You have not had much experience in towns?"

"A good deal," said Scott, reflectively; "but not for a long spell. I crammed a pile of fact into a short spell and got tired mighty soon. It's always the way, even here, I notice, though you don't get tired so quick, nor you don't stay that way long. When I get all out of sorts, be it night or day, I walk out on this island, and that's enough for me: I'm quieted right off, an' me and everything in the world seems to suit one to t'other. I look at them stars a-shinin' an' a-twinklin' so easy and careless up thar, an' then see 'em looking the same in the water, with a little tremble."

Florian had waked the hermit into a quiet enthusiasm, which showed itself only in the quantity of his words; for as to animation of gesture, or look, there was none. He thought it a fair opportunity to put a few leading questions. "I do not wonder at such feelings," he said, "for I have often thought that such a life would be a second paradise."

"It is, it is," interrupted Scott, earnestly. "I declare to you I never knew what happiness really was till I lit on this place."

"But its disadvantages are so many," continued the youth, "and loneliness is the first. Then when sickness overtakes you, or feebleness, the comforts

of companionship, and particularly of religion, are wanting."

"Well, about religion I can't say much," taking the youth by the arm and beginning to walk up and down, "for I don't s'pose I've got a good pile of it. I don't care for the comforts of companionship. I have never suffered half as much from lonesome feelin's here as in the world. There's nothin' stands between me and God but this, boy"—and he beat his body. "And God is here," he added reverently, "and who can say that he is lonely with such a Bein' round? I can't. I found out when I was like you that you've got to be alone most of the time. Those you think most of are very near, but they only show you that you can't git any mortal man or woman as near your heart as you want. God only can fold you right up and satisfy you; and He's all I want or expect."

"I have often thought of trying it for a time," said Florian—"this life. I love these scenes so. I love the beautiful solitude of such a night as this—a solitude so full of voices that but for their harmony you might think yourself among men. But old ties are hard to break. You, perhaps, had no such ties to hold you to the world."

"I had my ambitions," said Scott, "but a breath blasts those foolish things. I had a few hearts bound to mine kind o' strong, but death makes short work of sich. No, of course I mightn't have had as many as you, but I had enough, I reckon; but still I got over 'em, and they never trouble me now."

"How did you happen to get a liking for this kind of life? Was it very hard at first?"

"No, it was never hard. I was kind of broken up and took to it for health's sake; then I stayed in it, and I'm goin' to stay in it till the end, if I can. Some morning they'll be lookin' for me and they'll find me dead. I'll be buried thar, I trust, whar the old house stands—unless," he added playfully, "the angels of the island will bury me quietly themselves, for I love 'em well, as they know."

"You are deserving of such a burial," said Florian; "no man has ever paid such honor to nature as you have in this section. I would like to be present when they bury you."

"The world doesn't come in to such funerals," Scott answered, laughing, "so you needn't expect to. Hadn't we better go in now and try to win over the old man?"

"One moment, Scott. I am going to ask a favor of you which you must grant me. I like this solitude and I like you. Will you permit me to come here sometimes and stay a week with you, and fish and hunt and talk with you? It will be only for a short time, as I will soon be going off from this place."

The hermit listened with patience to this bold request.

"I don't invite any one here," he said reservedly; "but if you want to you kin come on conditions. You're not to talk about me to any one as long's you live; and as to your comin', remember I don't invite any one, and they can't come too seldom."

Without waiting to receive Florian's thanks for so concise and negative an invitation, he went hastily into the cabin. Ruth had reconciled her father to



the proposition of an embassy of peace to the governor, and from considering the woes of exile the hearty Squire had passed to the contemplation of a homely yet safe future, and he was ready with all sorts of advice for his young ambassador.

"Don't stoop, Florian—don't yield an inch. They'll be glad enough to listen to you when they hear your message. I'd rather an older man would go; but you have the ability, and 'twill be an opening for you. You'll get acquainted with the nobs, and a slight hint that you're related to me won't do any harm. A good deal may come of it. Revolutionists are the style of this age, and you reflect some of their glory. Mackenzie won't like it. He'll be in jail, and I'll be out; but pshaw! Why didn't he have gumption enough to hoe his own row in Canada? I did my share on this side. I'll be blest if I'll do any more."

"That's the way I look at it," Scott began.

"I don't want you to look at it," snapped the Squire. "What do you know about the matter? Get correct ideas of Almighty God, before you dabble in politics."

"Good advice," said Florian, "if politicians themselves will follow it."

"Now, see here, Pen'l'ton," said the hermit bluntly, "don't you know you've made a fool of yourself in this matter?"

"Yes, of course I do. I admit it. Go on, confound you! A fool who wouldn't make a fool of himself talking with you! It makes me foolish just to look at you."

"Sh!" cried Florian, with sudden and tragic em-

phasis. A death-like silence fell on the place. Ruth threw her arms about her father, and the hunter blew out the candle.

"I'll reconnoiter," said he, and stole away. Not a word was spoken until he returned.

"I think all's square," he said, relighting the candle, "but the best thing to do is to git to bed, or the next warning might have some meanin' in it. You, Miss, can have this room here, and take the candle along. Your paw an' the youngster kin take the floor with a blanket."

Ruth took the candle and kissed the Squire good-night with an anxious face. As she was passing into the room Florian whispered:

"Don't be frightened. I only did it to stop the argument."

She laughed and went in.

"There's your blankets," said Scott, throwing them on the floor. "Good-night."

And without paying any attention to their protestations, he opened the door and was gone.

"A nice fellow, but glum," were the Squire's last words as he glided into the bass of an all-night snore. Florian himself was already asleep, and his dreams were very beautiful when the moon looked in through the little window of the cabin and shone on his upturned face. It seemed to him that a sublime figure stood beside him. It was an angel, before whose radiance the moon grew dim, and his broad wings stretched from horizon to horizon, long spears of brilliancy. On his face rested a smile so heavenly that Florian stretched out his hands to invite his embrace. The angel stooped and kissed him; he

felt the cold lips and the cheek on his own, and at once felt all his glory departing. With a cry of sorrow he awoke. All was stillness around him, and the moon was smiling through the window.

"A dream worthy of the place," said Florian. "I'm going to see the island at two o'clock of the morning."

He jumped up and was preparing to go out when a low moan met his ear. It was smothered and distant, yet the agony was so exquisite that a sudden tremor of fear seized him. He tried to locate it, but in vain, and hurried out into the open air. The moaning never ceased for a moment, and the anguish was so keen that Florian ran hither and thither, but no trace of the cause could be found. The huge boulder on which the cabin stood was searched on all sides. Away from it the moans grew fainter, yet around it they seemed far off and smothered, and he continued the search until they died away entirely.

The charm of the night was far beyond the praise of words, so weird, so unreal, so supernatural was every tint that the moon's delicate brush laid on the canvas. For an hour he sat on a bench that overlooked the river. He heard a noise below him at the river's edge directly under the boulder. Taking the shelter of a bush that grew there, he looked down to see the hermit quietly standing there with his eyes turned to the sky. He was weeping, and his face was pale. Florian drew back and fled softly to the house. He had no wish to play the spy, however great his curiosity, and as he lay down his heart was full of a great pity for this lonely man.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE SICK ROOM.

BEFORE his departure for Albany Florian seemed so satisfied about his relations with Ruth that Linda forebore to question him. But she gave Ruth no peace until she had worried some information concerning their midnight adventures.

"We sailed to that little island where Scott lives," said Ruth, "and sailed back again. There was nothing more to it."

"Where is the island?" said Linda. "What is its name?"

"It has none that I heard of. It looked so lonely and small that I named it Solitary Island in my own mind."

And so the island was thereafter called by all who were concerned in the Squire's escapade.

"I must go see it some time," said Linda. "And Florian did not get spiteful once the whole evening, nor say harsh things, nor get moody?"

"Why should he?"

"Well, he was in a queer state of mind that night," said Linda, "although he didn't show it, nor tell me why. I thought something was going to happen."

She said this so roguishly that Ruth blushed.

"I see I must out with the whole thing, you stubborn heretic," Linda went on. "Now tell me, please,

haven't you and Florian come to any agreement about your future life?"

"Long ago," said Ruth.

"But that's the old story," pouted Linda, "it was 'if' here and 'if' there. What I am dying to know is, if you have done with 'ifs.'"

"No," said Ruth briefly.

"Then his heart failed him at the last minute, for as sure as Florian rowed across the bay so sure was he of ending suspense that night," said Linda; "and I must say I am glad of it, for while you remain on the fence, Ruth, he will put off his departure for New York."

"He will not have to delay long," Ruth said. "I am pretty near a decision now."

"You are going to stay on the Methodist side. I can tell it by the length of your face. And you so sensible, so tender about public display, and all that. I credit you with better sense. Well, I'll go to see you sit on the conviction bench and hear you shout glory when the spirit seizes you."

"There are Methodists and Methodists," said Ruth, meekly.

"Forgive my impertinence," Linda pleaded. "*You* would make Mormonism sweet if anything could. I shall not pester you with questions any more, but leave everything to time and *le bon Dieu*. But oh, my heart is just bound up in the idea of being your bridesmaid, and it will break into little bits if I am disappointed."

Florian returned from Albany successful, and the girls met him at the depot. "It's all settled," said he. "All your father has to do, Ruth, is to

deliver himself up to the marshal, when he will be released on parole and no further trouble given him."

"How can we ever thank you?" said Ruth tearfully; for her anxiety had been very severe.

"It was none of my doing. The governor was only too glad to hear my proposition, and there was no diplomacy required. I had dinner with him afterwards, and found out the true inwardness of the whole matter."

"I should have been there," said Linda. "I do so want to dine with a governor! What a place this is—not a distinguished man in it!"

"And what did he say to you?" asked Ruth.

"So many things that it will take some time to relate them. When we have had dinner you shall hear every word."

But events had been happening in his absence of a week, and before dinner his mother felt urged to call them to his attention. Mrs. Winifred was full of anxiety with regard to many things, but never found it necessary to make any parade of her feelings before her family.

"Seemingly, dear," she said to Florian, who was most patient with her, "we're going to have trouble in various ways, and I was wondering if you noticed anything."

"Did *you* notice anything, mother?" said Florian.

"Well, I can't say that I did, but it's hard sometimes to decide. Now, there's Linda——"

"Linda?" said Florian, smiling. "I wasn't aware there was anything the matter with her."

"No, to be sure not," said she; abashed that no

other had found anything amiss with Linda ; “ but seemingly, Florian, she doesn’t eat much, and she grows thin and white with every day ; but of course I’m wrong.”

“ No, you’re not, mother,” said Florian, jumping up. “ I did take notice, not so very long ago, either.”

“ Then, Sara,” began Mrs. Winifred with more hesitation— “ I don’t know. I’m not sure, but seemingly she’s quite indifferent to her religion lately. I make wrong—”

“ No, no,” said Florian ; “ but that’s a gentle way of saying a very serious thing, mother. Go on ; you’re not wrong.”

“ She has a great liking for Mr. Buck, seemingly ; of course I wouldn’t say that she had, but her actions—and then if your father saw anything wrong he would be put out.”

“ I should think so,” said Florian ; “ and Sara would be locked up, as she must be, I fear, before this unhappy affair is ended. She hasn’t enough mind to know what religion is, and I fear—I fear—”

He passed into a meditation without finishing the sentence, and tapped the table with his fingers. A sob aroused him. Mrs. Winifred was weeping and was plainly ashamed of herself for the action.

“ Well, I don’t think the matter requires—”

“ I know it,” said she ; “ but then I couldn’t help thinking of her being a minister’s wife, seemingly.”

“ Time, time,” said Florian, “ give me time and I’ll move Mr. Buck in another direction. He is afflicted with the desire of converting us all, Père

Rougevin included. Was the Père here to see us? Does he know of the matter?"

"No," said Mrs. Winifred.

"I must tell him, then. He is good at devising sharp maneuvers. Perhaps he will think of something. But now Linda must be looked after. If we lose that flower——"

He went out to hunt her up, without finishing a sentence whose import he did not realize while he thought of it. Linda was eating grapes in the garden.

"That looks well," thought Florian, and called her to the veranda. "You are to come with me this afternoon," said he, "and make one of the Squire's triumphal procession homeward. Here, what's this? You are too pale. And why does your dress fit so loosely, Miss? I noticed it a week ago, and to-day I noticed it still more."

"I never fatten till winter," said she soberly; "and then I am thinking a good deal lately."

"Sleeping, you mean. What about?"

"About your visit to New York, Florian," she said, holding up some grape-leaves to shade her face. "You needn't hide it. I know you're more than ever determined on going there, and I was thinking how I should amuse myself when you were gone."

"I won't deny your assertion, Linda, but my going is far off. There are too many obstacles in the way."

"I know them, and I feel wicked enough to wish they would stay in your way a long time. What nonsense," she added, "to borrow trouble! While



Ruth wavers and Sara is under Mr. Buck's spells we shall not lose you."

"You remind me of my chains," he said smiling to hide his real annoyance. "And there is another more binding than they."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"I won't tell you. Be content that while Ruth wavers and Sara affects Mr. Buck I shall remain—and then longer, perhaps," he said sighing.

Linda stood looking and thinking at random, and questioning why these things should be. In a few months the most perfect object of the perfect scene would make part of it no longer. That sun and sky above her; those marvelous islands, whose perfumes the fresh winds fanned to the shore; that water whose beauty was beyond that of jewels; the quaint town, so old and so clean and so loved, its white-headed and dark-headed people, its green foliage and autumn fruits, its bells and sweet and harsh noises; the stars that besprinkled the river firmament as well as that of heaven; the ghostly moon, the white-winged boats, and a thousand other loved, familiar things, would all be just as they were to-day and last night, but her brother would be gone. Nay, there was a time when she herself would make no part of the scene, and yet the glories of it would remain; newer eyes would gaze upon it and see, perhaps, all that remained of her—a white stone in the graveyard, and a name. How could that little world of which she was the center ever get along without her? Would it not be strange to feel that Linda Wallace lay out of sight in the earth, and children played thoughtlessly on her grave, and no one spoke

of her more? She began almost unconsciously to weep.

"This is all there is of earth," said she, "and one might as well live in a desert. Heaven is the only thing worth striving for."

"A correct sentiment," said Florian. "Dry your tears and come in to dinner. Your liver is plainly out of order when *you* become so religious."

She laughed and went in with him, and was gay enough for the rest of the day until the boat was fitted out and the three were sailing to Solitary Island. The wind was quite fresh at three o'clock in the afternoon, but not too much so until they entered Eel Bay. There some caution was required up to the very landing-place in front of the hermit's dwelling, for the wind blew straight down the channel. It was very awkward of Florian that he should have thrown his hat into the air as the hermit and the Squire both came to the door.

He was so vain of his good news!

"Look out, boy!" said Scott and the Squire together.

But it was too late. The boat capsized and threw the crew into the rough water. There being no danger, the Squire raged and became profane. The girls both swam into shallow water and were helped ashore, laughing and yet a little frightened. Florian was cast down with shame.

"The house is open to you," said Scott, "and you young ladies had better light a good fire and dry your clothes or you'll ketch a tall cold. And when you go a-sailin' again jes' look out who runs the boat."

"It never happened before," muttered Florian, "and I'd give my right hand if it had never happened."

"There it is," said Scott; "mighty big pay for so little value. 'Twon't hurt the girls, *I'm* sure."

"I'm not," said the youth briefly, as he looked apprehensively at Linda climbing the rock in her wet clothes. However, they appeared at sundown with clothes dried comfortably, and none the worse for their ducking. Florian had also put himself in proper shape and was entertaining the admiring Squire with his account of Albany and its notables.

"Ah! Florian," said he, "there's where you should be, among kindred spirits, among the high-fliers."

"If I were a young man——" Scott said.

"But you aren't—you never will be. When you were, you didn't follow your own opinions; so what use to inflict them on the young fellow, who doesn't care a button for your solitary way of living?" said the Squire.

"I don't want the lad to live solitary, Pen'l'ton," said Scott; "let him double up, if he wants to, but let him stick to Clayburgh and happiness. He'll go wrong sure, if he gets out into these dizzy conventions. He hasn't got the right—well, I don't know what to name it, but here's the place for him to thrive."

"Theory, theory! Scott, I'm obliged to you for what you've done, and if I could make you a sensible man I'd do it; but I can't, so call and see me and Ruth—she's sweet on you—when you feel like it. Come, girls—home, home to that confounded government." He ran down the shore to the boat after

a hearty handshake with the hermit, while Ruth poured her gratitude upon the solitary.

"It's all right, Miss," said he. "I'm content, and I hope you'll pray for me that I may never be more unhappy than I am now. Go ahead. I'll call to see ye some time."

He stood on the rock in front of his house long after they started.

"It makes me lonely to look at him," said Linda—"we going to our cheerful homes, he to his solitude."

"He is like a man dead," said Florian.

The next morning Linda awoke with a high fever and a slight cough as the effects of her wetting the day before, and Florian felt a severe twinge of grief as he saw the extreme pallor of her countenance and its faulty bloom. She had taken a chill during the night, but a little addition to the bed-clothing had banished it. No alarm was felt. In healthy people these little irregularities occur and pass away, and so it would be with Linda. Mrs. Winifred, however, was anxious. The girl was not strong, she said; a doctor could be easily summoned; and then no one knows what might happen.

Youth laughed at these anxieties until pain came to add its warning—pain in the lungs sharp and distressful—and the cough grew more racking with every hour. Towards night it grew serious. They tried their old house remedies and wished to treat her illness as a cold, a mere cold, which youth and health throw off so easily. But in vain. Linda grew more feverish and caught her breath more frequently. She was banished at last to bed and the doctor called in.

There is his knock at the door. Every one looks cheerful on hearing it, and the physician, smiling as he enters, gruffly desires to know what people have been doing to get sick this fine weather. Why, even the old are full of silly thoughts of escaping this year's rheumatism! And Linda there with her brows contracted with pain! Pshaw! nonsense! Pain in the lungs? How do you know it's the lungs? What do women know about the lungs? Lungs, indeed! Pains when you breathe, hey? Ah! where have you caught cold? Ducked in this weather? Yacht upset? Who upset it? Never mind who? But I will mind, and I'll call him a donkey, an ass, a mule, to upset a yacht with a woman in it? Why not have drowned at once instead of coming home to take a pain in the lungs, and get a fever and a pulse at one hundred and ten? Why go out on the water in stormy weather?

"Why do anything naughty and nice?" says Linda between two frowns of pain.

"There's Eve over again," says the doctor, writing out prescriptions with a laugh. "I'll call at two o'clock in the morning," said the physician. "I'm going out ten miles into the country, and I'll call coming back: have the door open for me. Good-night, Miss Linda. You had the 'nice' yesterday; you are having the 'naughty' to-day."

Outside he looked significantly at Florian.

"Pneumonia," said he—"not necessarily fatal, but apt to be. Follow my directions to the letter until I return. We may bring her through."

Florian stood holding the door and looking out

into the glowing autumn night. The cheery voices of sailors came up from the river, and the lights at the mastheads shone like colored stars. He was hot and disturbed. Linda's days were over perhaps, and that one dear obstacle to his ambitions was to be removed by death. He went in again with a smiling face, and ran against Mrs. Winifred crying silently. What could he say? Death was bitter enough, but she was to suffer death so often that he hastened on into the sick-room and left her unconsoled.

"Shall I stay with you," he asked, "or do you prefer to sleep, Linda?"

"I can't sleep," she answered with a hushed voice; "and if I doze it is better to have some one near and the lamp burning. I am very ill, Flory, and I am afraid."

"Afraid, dear?" trying successfully to steady his voice. "Afraid of what?" though he knew right well the cause of her fear, and trembled because of its truth. How sad he would feel if death stole on him so suddenly, and he so young!

"Of death," she answered. "We talked of many things, Florian, but never of that, never of that? And it is so hard to die. Tell me something of it, Florian; you have read of it many times."

"If you are near to it," said he, "your own feelings can tell you more than books or men. Mostly the dying are indifferent to the agony, particularly where they have led good lives or innocent lives like yours, Linda."

"Yes, yes, I led an innocent life," she said simply. "Thank God for that? Innocence is something."

"It is all," said Florian; "it has never known sin, and does not know suffering. But what a subject for a patient who is to get well. It would be better to go to sleep; or shall I read to you?"

"Read to me, Flory, and talk as you read."

He went down to his study to select a volume. There were many books in his possession and he knew them all by heart; dangerous books none of them, only the best and purest grain of the world's harvest. What should he select?

"Nothing too pious, for that would frighten the poor child; nothing frivolous, for that would not suit the condition of one so near death."

He walked suddenly to the window choking. "Do I realize it, Linda, that I may lose you?"

He took out Bonaventure's *Life of Our Lord*, and when he had gone to the sick-room and had pronounced the story of the Passion she was not surprised at the subject.

"It is so appropriate," she murmured: "I am having my passion."

He read to her until her eyes closed in uneasy slumber, and then sat watching the flushed face and thinking. Mrs. Winifred was the only other person who came near the sick-room, and she was unable to control her tears even under Florian's sharp reproof. She remained a great part of the time in self-banishment, and he dwelt alone in the sacred silence of a sick-room. Linda was fond of white and light colors, and her chamber was fitted up accordingly. In the dim light it looked like a dream. Her pale forehead and flushed cheeks on the pillow were more an outline than reality. It scared him when he

thought how short the time until they might be on another pillow in the graveyard.

"Linda!" he called suddenly in an overflow of anguish. She awoke with a start, and at the same instant he heard a carriage at the door.

"The doctor has come again, dear," he said. "Did I frighten you?"

"No," looking around in amazement, and then, with a sigh, realizing her sad position.

When the news went out of her dangerous illness a number of friends called, but Ruth and Père Rougevin alone were admitted along with the doctor, and seeing them Linda began to fear because of all the trouble in her behalf. Three visits from a doctor in so short a time, one from the priest, and the distant sound of doors closing so frequently, with many little circumstances to which she had hitherto paid no attention, were at the least ominous; and even while they stood about her smiling cheerfully, she closed her eyes to keep back the bitter tears that would fall in spite of her determination to be brave and hopeful. They understood the reason of the grief, and could say nothing.

Sara, coming in as her sister's tears were falling, was impressed, as only her shallow soul could be impressed, with a wild fright that prompted her to scream. Fortunately she restrained the inclination, since it was purely personal, and a little thought convinced her that it was another's, not her own death-bed she was attending. Père Rougevin prevented a scene by banishing the whole company, himself included, from the room, leaving Ruth to attend the patient.



"Wait," said Linda, feebly. "If I am going to die I must get the sacraments."

"I can do nothing more than hear your confession," said the priest; "you are not in sufficient danger for the reception of the others."

The look in Linda's eyes was a very pleasant one at this precise, official declaration, and it said clearly that she regarded Père Rougevin, stout, flushed, and short though he was, as an angel.

"I thought I was dying," she stammered.

"Nonsense, child! But you may die, and it's well to be prepared," he said. "You must be ready to live or die, as God wills."

"Alas!" murmured Linda, with a fresh flood of tears, "I am only too willing to live."

"There's no sin in that," was the sententious remark, and she proceeded with her confession.

"I must be very bad," she said to Ruth afterwards when they were alone. "I am terribly afraid of dying."

"Who is not?" said Ruth. "And then it is so near us always. I have tried to get used to the thought of it, but I can't. I suppose it does indicate a lack of some good religious feeling that we ought to have."

They were all surprised one day at a visit from Scott, the hermit, who walked in as informally as a friend might, and found his way to the sick-room. In his solitude Scott looked picturesque, with his rough ways and dress, and curly red hair; but in the dainty sick-room he was as much out of place as an Indian in full war-paint. All were startled, and Mrs. Winifred so much so as to lose her senses. Old

habits are strong, however, and she offered him a foot-stool instead of a chair, vainly feeling for its absent back while her eyes stared rudely but helplessly on the apparition.

"No, thank ye. I'll not come in," said the hermit, with his eyes fixed on Linda. "I jest heard the little girl was sick, and I thought it might have been the duckin'. I'm glad you're better, Miss. Take care of yourself. Good-morning."

He was off in an instant, but Florian seized him almost rudely and pushed him into his study.

"You are very kind," said he, "and you must not go until you are thanked and hear all about Linda."

"She's gettin' well," said the hermit. "I reckoned so from her eyes."

Scott began to examine the books in the room with interest.

"All of 'em good, sound ones," he said, "if their names mean anything."

"Would you like to borrow some?" said Florian.

"No, thank 'ye; I han't no need of 'em, but I'm right glad to see you with sich books. I guess I'll be goin'; I'm kind of hasty in my call, but usually I don't make any."

"We're so obliged to you," Florian replied, "and would be very glad to see you again."

The hermit made no remark as he left the room and ran against Mrs. Winifred outside in the hall. The lady evidently wished to say something but was disconcerted at the right moment.

"What is it, mother?"

"Linda!" gasped Mrs. Winifred—"the gentleman—seemingly——"

"Oh! Linda would like to see you again before you go, Scott."

"Anything to oblige the young miss," said the hermit, and he followed Florian into the sick-room.

"I wanted to thank you," whispered Linda; "you are very kind. Send me some wild flowers—the very latest."

"You'll have 'em to-night, Miss," said the hermit. "Good-day, ma'am—good-day."

And he hurried awkwardly from the room.

"I shall call on you soon," said Florian as they parted. He merely bowed gravely and walked away.

## CHAPTER V.

### ON RETREAT.

LINDA during the next two weeks continued to improve, and by the middle of October was sitting cheerfully, in the warm parlor, with every soul in the house and many more out of it her devoted slaves. Choice flowers came from Mr. Buck, through Sara, to call back the summer to her room and have it live again in their sweet perfumes and gay colors. Squire Pendleton brought his fearful voice daily to her court and related over again the new and old phases of his political exile. Ruth's gentle touch and sweet eyes were there most frequently, and most welcome; and Père Rougevin and Florian made up a background of spiritual and physical lights that were very dear to the sick girl. When she arrived at this stage of returning health, Florian made ready to visit the hermit for a week's hunting and fishing. "More for the purpose of studying the hermit," he explained to Linda, "and learning the secret of his happiness, if there is any." Linda took up a bunch of ferns arrived that morning from the kindly solitary, and buried her face in it.

"You but waste your time," she answered, "as far as he is concerned. Still he is a good mirror. You will certainly learn something about yourself."

She said this in the tone of a hint, which Florian received with a laugh that discovered him.

"Your sickness has made you sharp," he said.

"Well, let me confess, I do go to study myself. What then, Cassandra?"

"Cassandra, indeed!" she pouted, and then surprised him with a sob and a few tears. "I am so weak yet, Florian, and I know you are only going to ask his advice about leaving here. I want you to promise that you will tell me every word."

"I am not so certain that he can or will advise me, Linda. Nor would I be apt to follow his advice if it went against my own desires. But I promise you, my dear; and you are quite right. *I am going on my retreat.*"

He sat looking at her with troubled eyes. He never looked at her otherwise since sickness first struck her down, and his first sensation of real grief was gnawing at his heart as he thought of what he would lose in losing her. And unconsciously, too, he was studying the course of feeling in her bosom, the gradual ripening certainty of death which, amid doubts and fears, was already blooming in the girl's heart and soul. Ambitious as he was, death had always appeared to him as a monster who might at any time destroy his ambitions. He had never yet come in contact with it. But now it had seized most surely on Linda, and he watched its process with a sort of fascination that sickened body and soul, and crowded his dreams with terrors. He must come to this one day. How soon?

It filled his heart with a disgust for life that all his days he must walk under the threatening shadow of that greatest misfortune. Why live and work at all when death might shatter the handiwork of years at one blow? The reasoning was poor and foolish,

but his melancholy had to find vent. The day shamed his melancholy by its magnificent joy. The wind was not strong enough to roughen the water into ugliness but white caps lay along the deep green of the river, and, like the foam at the mouth of a wild beast, gave a suspicion of the cruelty that lurked below. Against Round Island's rocky and flat shore the waves beat with monotonous murmuring, and distant Grindstone showed dimly through the mist. Across Eel Bay the afternoon sun sent a blinding radiance. The islands about were still in somber green, for very few maples found a foothold in the rocky soil. Their warm colors of death relieved the dark background. The swish of the water from the bow, the brightness of the sky, the somber shores, the green waters, the whistle of the wind, and the loveliness of the scene passed before his senses and became inwoven with his melancholy. There was a bitterness even in the cheerful day. When he arrived at Solitary Island the hermit was away. He took possession of the hut, and, finding some remnants of the Squire's tobacco and a pipe, made himself at home and began to inspect one of the notable volumes on fishing. Scott returned shortly and gave him a cool reception.

"How do?" he said shortly, bringing his brows together and sending a sharp look into his face. "How's the little 'un?"

"As before," Florian answered wearily. He had made up his mind that no behavior of Scott's would drive him away until he had accomplished his purpose. And Scott saw it in his easy manner, and seemed willing to submit to the intrusion.

"She bade me thank you for the ferns," said Florian, "and if it would not be asking too much, would you call and see her as often as you visit the town, and would your visits be oftener made."

"She is kind," was all Scott replied, and set about getting supper. Florian made no offer to help him, but walked out on the boulder with his book and pipe, and gave his attention to the long shadows that crept through and over the islands and the last feeble whistle of the dying winds. Far away east glimmered a single star.

"Supper's ready!" called Scott in a few minutes, and Florian sat down to a table of Spartan simplicity—boiled corn-meal and fish. It was speedily ended, for neither seemed to be hungry nor disposed to talk. The hermit sat silent, and Florian was determined to interfere as little as possible with his humors. He ate less than a child.

"I have met him at an unlucky time," thought the youth; "he is ill and out of sorts." But he said nothing whatever, relighted his pipe and took his seat on the boulder over the river. For a few minutes there was the clatter of tin dishes as the solitary cleaned them and put them away, then he came out and sat beside Florian.

"I am going away," said Florian simply. "I wanted to talk with you first, and so came over."

The stars were coming out more rapidly, as if a mist were being swept off the sky, and the shadows lay very deep around. The water in the channel, like a wizard's mirror, changed from dark to bright and back again, as if veiled forms swept up and down beneath the surface.

"And so you are going away?" said Scott, presently.

"I should have gone long ago. Clayburgh is no place for one who looks to a future. I am smothered and cramped for a better element."

"Your dreams are too big for your brain. Six feet of earth hold a man comfortably when he's not full of nonsense."

"But it takes an eternity to hold the soul."

"Not as I understand it, boy. It's not the soul gets cramped with such quarters as ye have here. It's proud notions of one's body: what it should eat and wear, how it should look to others, an' the niceness o' bein' better than its kind. People don't go looking for eternity to New York. Them who found it suited to their constitutions hunted in narrow caves an' monks' cells for it, long afore New York was known to a soul."

"I won't dispute your assertions. But what would you have me do? I am young and ambitious. The world must go on as it has from the beginning. Why should not I take place and part in it, using my talents for the good of the many? I have no inclination for any other kind of life, and there I feel that I shall do the most good."

"Why not?" echoed the hermit with a touch of sarcasm, perhaps. "Saints did the same often, I've heard; but they made their talents and high power a means to an end. With you it will be the end. With the big majority these good things of the world are the end. The man that looks after his own soul keeps away from 'em till God calls him to 'em."

He rose suddenly as if he had spoken too much



and was just aware of it. There was no moon, and Florian could not see his face nor discover what mood accompanied these words, but he would have given something to catch the light of his eyes at that moment.

"You can have the hut to yourself while you stay," said Scott, starting off down the shore.

"Thank you," Florian said quietly, and was tempted to ask him to remain, but adhered firmly to his determination and kept his mouth shut grimly until the sound of cars down the channel had ceased. It was chilly and dark on the island. There was no wind, only the gentle splash of the waves; and the odd, mysterious sounds, which break the vast silence of nature, quivered on the air. He could see nothing but outlines and the shining surface of the water. Like an inverted bowl the sky arched over him. He knew that for miles there was no living man, and he was in utter darkness and solitude; and it seemed to him that he was left nothing to look upon but his own soul. He was too sad to endure thought at that moment, and began to bustle about, lighted a candle in the hut and put on a fire, closed the doors and fixed the curtain to the window.

The October nights were cold and left a touch of frost in bare places. When the sun opened his eyes the next morning at an early hour, and Florian looked through the window on the scene without, there was a silvery whiteness on certain objects, beautiful but depressing. An army of individual mists was rising from the river, and every object was bathed in so fresh and deep a color that it seemed

to have just been laid on by the great Master's hand. He dressed and bade a hasty good-morning to the hermit, who was getting the breakfast, and ran out on the boulder to say his prayers in the midst of that sublime scenery. He prayed aloud, and never in his life did prayer seem so sweet, so real, so refreshing.

"Grub," said the hermit, briefly, from the doorway, and he went in composedly after that ethereal flight heavenward. The meal passed in silence. When it was over, "I'm going for pike this mornin'," said Scott, briefly.

Florian took this for a gingerly invitation, and coolly removed himself, his pipe, and his book to the boulder without answering. The hermit busied himself in preparing his boat.

"Would you like to come?" said the solitary.

"I have much to think of," he replied.

"Better get town cobwebs from your brain first. The fishin' is good, an' if ye are going away 'twon't be many more chances you'll have after the world's pike take your time."

"To-morrow will do, Scott; much obliged."

"No, I'm in-doors to-morrow."

"Next day, then."

"Not at all if not now," said Scott, and if his voice was not sharp his words were. Florian was surprised at his urgency.

"Oh! if you are determined," he laughed, and came down, book and pipe, to the boat. They rowed through the channel out into the broader space that opened into Eel Bay—or rather the solitary did, for Florian lay in the stern idly smoking.

Said Florian, "Why in the name of heaven, Scott,

don't you write poetry? I couldn't stay in these solitudes an hour without finding words to paint some of its beauty."

"It is like grief, boy; no words can express it."

And then a shade came over Florian's face, for his mind went back suddenly to Linda.

"At this hour," he said, "Linda is taking a look at the new sun that will shine for her only a little longer."

"Poor little girl!" muttered the hermit, giving a harder pull to his oars.

"But what of that, Scott? She goes to heaven safely, I know, and her agony will be trifling to her recompense. I would not care but for that other dying at the same time, not in her body but in her soul."

"It is one of the world's chances," said Scott. "She will marry the minister and come to believe what he will preach day and night for her sake. There is no fixin' sich accidents."

"You seem to know all about the matter, Scott."

"It is town-talk, lad. Ye brought it up yourself as if ye wanted my opinion, an' I gave it."

"Well, I didn't want your opinion," he said; "I wanted to know what you would do in such a case as that of my sister's. If she wishes to marry Mr. Buck I see no way of preventing her, unless it be by stratagem. It is not so much love of the minister as a romantic silliness that prompts her to marry."

"If you want stratagem," said Scott, "see Père Rougevin. That's my whole and only opinion on a family matter. Jes' hand up the minneys, will ye, and I'll drop the line yonder."

The strong colors of the early morning that glowed around him only added to his melancholy. He merely raised his head and smiled when Scott landed his first pike, a handsome five-pounder, and felt none of that joyous excitement which such an incident raises in the heart of the true sportsman. It was as if life had come to a standstill with him because of the tangle in his affairs, and he was borne away through a fairy region of indifference.

Before noon the hermit had landed a few dozen of the shining pike and Florian had dreamed the hours away. Not unprofitably, perhaps, for he had arrived at the sensible resolve that he would make no attempt to win Scott's confidence, but let the man display himself as it pleased him. And was he to spend the hours as he had spent the forenoon, in useless imaginings and doleful picturings of his future troubles? He took the rod after dinner and began to whip the water with an energy unnecessary so far as the fish were concerned, but he wished to show himself that he was in earnest. He had come to fish, hunt and study the hermit. The true way to do all this was to fish, hunt, and study at the proper times, and Scott implied by secret smiling that he conjectured his course of thought. As a consequence, when night found them again on the plateau in conversation the hermit was quite humorous and fluent and inclined to talk of anything. When Florian made bold to tell him something of his present sorrows he was sympathetic.

"I am afraid there is little real warmth in my nature, Scott. I contemplate Linda's death, and

Sara's apostasy, and separation from Ruth with a light degree of sorrow, and I foresee how I shall work all the harder afterwards."

"A young man's feelings," said Scott, "are not to be depended on. Wait till all these things happen, and then you'll find how you'll take 'em. It's much like a man in consumption. He will die in four years, the doctor says. He's resigned, and surprises himself by not thinking o' death often at all. When death gets hold on him, though, he finds his former feelings weren't much. Now, I think your Linda will die and Sara marry the minister, an' ye'll go to New York without Ruth. An' it isn't so much these things that ought to bother a man as his steppin' out inter life an' takin' a choice of labor. He ought to see that he got the right place. He ought to be sure that he couldn't do better in all ways whar he is than thar. People are hasty about things of this kind. Money is the object an' high position. If they get these, life is complete. If not, they're lost. They don't think much about the soul. They drag it anywhere, quite sure it can get along. Some people there are who will be damned for studying medicine, an' they might hev known it before. An' political ambition will damn others, jes' as I think it will damn you."

"I would like to know your reasons for such a thought," said he.

"Mostly because your weakness will be well educated and your strong points let run in politics, but entirely because you are cut out for another situation."

"You interest me," said Florian. "Pray what

are the weaknesses and the strengths, and the other situation?"

"A young man about to make a jump for such big prizes ought to be ashamed to ask such questions from any man. Ye came here to study yerself. Do it: I'm off. A pleasant night to you. I'll not see ye to-morrow."

Florian sat silent until the sound of oars had been lost in the distance. It was such a night as the preceding one had been—the earth all darkness, the sky pierced with starlight, and a cool south breeze beginning to wake strange murmurs from the shore and the trees. A few clouds lay like shadows on the horizon, and above and below was that beautiful stillness, so beautiful yet so painful, like that which lay about the prophet waiting on Horeb's rock to hear the still, small voice of God. It seemed to Florian that some voice must be born of such an agony of silence; perhaps it was born, and his ear too coarse to catch a sweetness so

"Fine that nothing lived 'twixt it and silence."

Those were sharp words the hermit had uttered, and they shed a new light on the youth's mind. What an idea was this, that some men could be damned for studying medicine? Yet it was true, he admitted, when he found the proper sense of the words. And might not he be placing himself in such a position? He was humbled to admit that, after all, he did not know himself nor had studied the every side of his ambitions. How far was he prepared to go, in seeking position and name? The kingdoms of the world and the glory of them were

sometimes easily bought by falling down to adore Satan. How would he withstand such a temptation? He hardly knew, but stole to bed crestfallen. The sound of the morning rain woke him from a very sweet sleep, but when that mournful patter reached his ears the conversation of the preceding evening recurred to him and a desolation crept upon his spirit.

"Was there another life for which he was better fitted?"

That other could be but a retired life in Clayburgh with its safe but respectable dullness, and Florian dismissed it with a savage snort as he dressed himself. He felt instinctively it was no life for him. He got breakfast, lit his pipe afterward, and sat in the open doorway singing at the mists that were closing in around him and the melancholy murmur of the rain. How long and how often such a dismal scene had been played upon the island! Perhaps a generation previous a group of savages had sat in their smoky wigwams on this very spot and looked grimly on such a rainfall, making weird fancies out of the mists and preparing charms against their fatal powers! And all these were dead! Linda was dying! Old affections of his heart were dying! The very scene about him was showing symptoms of decay. In fifty years at most he too would be dead. What difference then between him distinguished and influential and the unknown hermit? Would wealth and station and influence be more than the simple pleasures of the solitude? And it was a doubtful matter if the statesman blessed by his country would stand as high as the hermit in the esteem of God!

Well, well, what queer thoughts were these in a young man.

The next day towards evening Scott made an unlooked for appearance with a bright eye and a flushed cheek.

"I'm goin' to take possession of the bed," said he "and you must shift to the floor. I'm ill."

"Oh!" said Florian, quite surprised that the hermit should make such an admission, but asking no questions. Scott had taken cold and was in a fever, and the youth rejoiced that fate should have thrown them together at a critical time. He was handy about a sick bed, woman-like in his gentleness and skill and power over his tongue. He made himself master of the situation at once and proceeded to treat the patient according to his own ideas. Had he discovered the true way of dealing with the hermit? Scott made no objections to anything he said or did, but seemed rather pleased with him. He was sick until the third day, when he became convalescent and began to turn to the old routine of cabin-work—meal-preparing, mending, and reading. It was raining still and the mists lay heavier on the island world, and Florian had by intense and desultory thinking wrapped his mind in mists so profound that he felt a positive desire to fly to the town. Therefore on the fourth evening he announced his departure for the next day.

"And I hope," said Scott, "that you got some benefit from the close study of yourself, and that you can pretty well answer the question ye asked me when ye first came.

"I shall go to New York," Florian replied, "come



what may. I shall not trouble myself with much thought hereafter, for I find it confusing ; and as to studying myself, my blunders will do that, and my enemies and friends."

"If you wait to know yourself that way, my lad, very good ; your political life will be short."

"We must run some risks, Scott. Anyway, I have got enough of solitude, as I have of Clayburgh, and I see nothing in my strength or weakness to tell against success in my chosen life. On the contrary I find myself longing for it. I shall be alone, I suppose, and for a time grief-stricken, but life will be there and will ; while you will fish and sleep in this prison and groan over your rheumatism. Before going it would tickle my vanity to know your estimate of my character, and a hint, just a hint, of that situation you spoke of the other day."

Florian had no expectation of receiving an answer to his request, and turned to the window through which he could see a break in the cloudy sky and the gleaming of a few stars. It was a dreary scene and his heart was full of its dreariness.

"I'm not anxious to disturb your good feelings," said Scott. "You are bound for to go, and your blunders will teach you better than my words. I can fancy how you won't know yourself ten years from now, and I propose that when you go home to-morrow you sit down and write an account of yer present feelin's and opinions, and leave it with me. I'll see that you git it to read ten years from date. You'll be surprised."

"Done," said Florian eagerly, delighted beyond measure at this evidence of the hermit's interest

in him. "I'll make it minute in essentials, my friend."

"I s'pose. All the worse for you an' maybe you'll not be astonished and ashamed readin' that paper in days to come. I had an idee of a man gentle and quiet, whose mind was jes' like the water on a still night, deep, clear, sweet, and full o' heaven an' the bright pints in it; who'd settle down to a steady, pious, thinkin' life, writin' fine things for other people to read, comin' nearer to God every year and bringin' others along with him, till he'd be so ripe for heaven as to fall into it from this world, jes' as natural as a ripe apple falls to the ground. I had that idee, but it's gone; and I mentioned it jest to show ye what a stranger thought o' ye."

"I'll put that down too," said Florian, thoughtfully, "and it might be interesting to read at the same time as the other. I'm much obliged to you, indeed; but it doesn't suit, and never would."

That was the end of the conversation. The hermit and Florian retired to rest with their usual indifference to each other and in their usual silence; but the youth was so charmed at his fancied success in winning the solitary's interest that he fell asleep thinking of it, and dreamed that the honest man rose in the night, and stooping over his bed kissed him gently two or three times, as his father might. He was weeping, for the tears fell in a shower on Florian's face, which set the youth to laughing, he knew not why. At this he woke. Everything was still save the patter of the rain on the roof, while the hermit was sleeping gently as a child.

## CHAPTER VI.

### DEATH.

FLORIAN found a suspicious lull resting on the home atmosphere of Clayburgh. Linda was quiet and happy, to judge from her manner and look. But there was no mistaking the sudden agony that seized him as he kissed her on his return. The blood leaped to his head in a blinding way, the tears pressed like a torrent to his eyes, but only a few drops fell, and dry sobs struggled in his throat and bosom. Did she understand the cause of such emotion? A tender look on her pale face, a shadow in the sweet eyes that threatened at once to dim them forever, were what had taken away his self-command so violently; and, as if it were but natural that he should so act, she drew his head to her breast, and placing her cheek against his soft hair, smoothed it with her delicate hand until the storm of grief had spent itself. When he looked up again both understood one another perfectly—Linda knew at last that she was dying!

"How is Scott?" said she. "I have done nothing but dream of him since you left."

"He sent you his very best esteem," said Florian, "and is to call on you soon, and all the flowers and herbs and grasses the islands afford are to be sent you. You have charmed him, Linda."

"I do not know why he has been so much in my

thoughts lately, but his red beard and keen eyes have haunted me pleasantly for two weeks. Probably because you were there with him. And what did he say to you? You know you promised to tell."

"He told me, very much like a fortune-teller, that I was cut out for a quiet life, and fitted to write beautiful things for the million. And when I told him my tastes ran in any direction but that, he said many people are damned for studying medicine or taking up politics, and he thought I would be too."

Linda's old nature, though softened by illness, rose up at this declaration and she laughed herself into a fit of coughing.

"Well, well! what an idea," she said. "But it is true in part. There are less temptations in such a life as this than in the life of a public man. Florian, I want to be so sure of meeting you again that whatever you choose be faithful to our religion and true to God, and never forget Linda. I don't care where I would be, I think I would feel so unhappy if you and I were not to meet again."

He could say nothing, but clasped her hand gently.

"And what were your own thoughts?" she asked. "How did you follow out your idea of a retreat?"

"You remember the crowd we saw at the revival camp-meeting? I have been in the condition of that crowd since I left, all turmoil and excitement, and my solitude put on so loud a personality before I left that I was less at home than in a ball-room. I got enough of the wilderness. I prefer a prison."

She shook her head deprecatingly.

"You made a blunder somewhere. You had no

system. You were prejudiced from the beginning. Well, no matter."

Florian grew suddenly uneasy. He had something to say, and could not command himself to say it. She saw his emotion and understood it.

"You must not think," she said, "that I am afraid or very sorry to die, and if you have anything to say you must be very frank with me."

"While we are together, Linda"—how very dear that name had become to him, that he hung on it as if it were sweetest music!—"whatever wish you have concerning me I would like to know and follow it."

"I will tell you all soon enough," she said, and for the time she was too weary to speak more. He sat beside her holding her dear hands and looking into the pallid face. The changes made by death were very painful. It had robbed them of the dear girl even before the soul had fled, for this was no more the Linda of old times than a stranger. She fell asleep soon, and he saw how completely death had seized her. The hollow eyes and parted mouth, the wasted hands, the feeble but labored respiration, were all eloquent of death. She slept sweetly, indeed, so sweetly that he could not help saying the angels were round her; but her eyes were only closed in part and it awed him to see how she seemed to look on him with her senses locked in slumber. And this was death! And just like this one day he would be, pale and hopeless and helpless and forsaken, the most neglected and the most respected of his kind, his uselessness protected in the sight of man by the overstepping majesty of death.

The day after his return Linda remained in bed, and to her mother's inquiry replied that she would never rise again. Mrs. Winifred accepted the position in her quiet way, but her silent despair brought the tears into the girl's eyes.

"There is no pain in dying," she whispered, "but in leaving you, mother."

From that moment she began to fade so gently that it seemed as if an angel, incapable of suffering, had come in her place to die. Florian did not leave her day or night. Ruth was often there, and Sara, her father, and the strong-voiced Squire, for she liked to see them all about her as in earlier, happier times, and to hear their jokes and bright sayings and pleasant gossip, and to imagine that she was just going to fall asleep for a little while, and, waking again, would find them all just as she had left them. Every day came a bunch of forest treasures from the hermit, mosses and rare leaves and bright red berries. He did not come himself, but her bed was so placed that she had a full view of the bay and the islands, and often saw his canoe or yacht flitting from one point to another. In the lonely nights Florian and Mrs. Winifred sat alone in the room, dimly lighted by the night lamp, and talked or read to her in her waking hours. When it became painful for her to speak at length, she contented herself with watching him for hours, as if studying out some difficult problem.

"Florian!"

"Yes, dear."

"You will be very much afraid to die."

"I trust not, Linda."

"But you will, I know, and I want to tell you that it is not as hard as we imagine. Only be good, do good, and it will be very easy."

"I shall try with my whole heart, Linda."

"You will not marry Ruth? She is good, Florian."

"How can I," he replied with some bitterness, "when my own good sense and hers, and Père Rougevin, are opposed to it? If she be not a Catholic I must be a Protestant."

"You will not forget, Linda, that you are to tell me your wishes before—before——You said you would."

"I only want to be sure of meeting you all again," she said. "You are very good, Florian, *now*. Promise me you will never grow worse, only better; that you will never cease to think as you think now; that you will always remember Linda."

"Is that all, dear?" he answered, with something like reproach.

"All!" she repeated. "Oh the old, old spirit of confidence. If you do that, Flory, if you do that much——" She ended with a smile, and after a little added: "Be careful of Sara; be kind to her, and save her if you can."

Those were almost her last words to him. Early the next morning Père Rougevin anointed her and gave her the Viaticum, the whole family and Ruth being present. Around the house that day fell the heavy curtains of death, invisible yet felt, shedding everywhere a funeral sadness. In her white chamber she lay with half closed eyes drinking in the colors of the scenes she had so tenderly loved. The end was very near—so near that at any moment the

light might fade from her face and the gentle breathing cease. Out on the blue waters the western sun was shining in a long bar of light broken often by the passing clouds, yet shining out every moment just as bright as before; and this shifting movement of the light occupied her attention. Mrs. Winifred alone was with her. In her meek way she supplied her needs and silently anticipated her simple wishes, and was so rapt in her dying child that she did not hear the knock at the door without or its repetition, or the steps which ascended the stairs, and entering the room in a quiet but abrupt way, suddenly presented to her the uncouth hermit. Mrs. Winifred was rather exasperating on such occasions. She was frightened and her face showed it; nevertheless she made no sign, and was meeker than usual when Scott rather imperiously waved her aside and took Linda's hand in his own.

So it happened Florian found him half an hour later in the same position when Mrs. Winifred came to hurry them all to the death-room—for death-room now it had become, since Linda lay like an infant in the arms of the king at last. At last and forever! There was no recall, no further hope. The girl's face bore a new expression, the seal which God first placed on Abel's young face, the protest of the body and the soul against sin's merited punishment, the reflected light from the torch of death! Florian took her left hand and gazed composedly on her face. There was something strange in her manner; a strange glory or triumph rested on her lips; there was more color and fire in her cheeks and eyes; and now she turned from Scott to him and back



again, looking like one hungry beyond words to tell, and looking yet again until death suddenly caught her weak breath and carried it to eternity and God. It was the first day of November, at four o'clock in the afternoon, with the sun shining on the river and great clouds rising in the east, that Linda died.

A month after Linda's burial it was snowing, and you could not see the houses on the next street. It promised to be a heavy snow-storm, not unusual for that district, and the dwellers by the river settled themselves comfortably for six months at their warm firesides. The Wallace home was gloomy and disordered. Florian in his own room was busy packing clothes and books for an immediate departure to New York, and he was working with feverish haste and unnecessary care. A knock at the door interrupted him and his mother entered at his bidding, calm as usual and the hair smoothly arranged over her placid cheeks. She was nervous, however, and distressed. Did he know what had become of Sara? It was rumored that she was married to Mr. Buck the preceding evening. Mr. Wallace had heard it just then in town. Florian could not but smile at Mrs. Winifred's calm acceptance of the ridiculous facts, and thought she must have perceived their absurdity.

"She went to Ruth's, probably," said he. "And who would blame her for leaving so lonely a house? But as to the story, don't you trouble yourself with such nonsense."

Mrs. Winifred, however, did not like to think it nonsense any more than she liked to doubt Florian's conclusion.

"Does father believe it?" said Florian.

"He is going to inquire of Mr. Buck himself, seemingly. If the minister denies it, he will come back; but if he does not, Mr. Wallace will smash and cut everything in his way."

"Let him," said Florian grimly. "If it be true, I'll second him. Then, paying the damages will teach him sense."

Mrs. Winifred sighed and cast a meek look at the trunks and boxes scattered through the room.

"Yes, I'm going, mother, at last," said he. "There is nothing here to hold me, is there? And as soon as I get settled I shall take Sara to keep house for me until she gets over her folly. I would prefer her following Linda than Mr. Buck. A monument is more satisfactory over one than an Episcopal meeting-house, even if it is——"

He kicked things around noisily and drowned the short, sharp burst of grief that followed his sarcasm. The door-knocker was going vigorously when silence was restored. Mrs. Winifred hastened to admit the callers. Her voice was strangely agitated as a moment later she called Florian to the parlor. He found her pale and trembling at the foot of the stairs and shaking as if with ague.

"It's true," she repeated. "O Linda!"

"What's true?" said Florian roughly, as he threw open the door violently and strode in frowning. Mr. Buck was there as painfully correct in costume as ever, and beside him Sara languishing in her mourning robes. One glance was enough, but Florian pretended not to understand.

"I thought it would be but fair," said Mr. Buck,

"to let you know of the relations which now exist between your sister and myself. We were married last evening at the rectory in presence of the officials and the leading members of my church, who understand the peculiar circumstances which led to the ceremony at so sad and unfavorable a time."

"It would have been better to have waited," said Florian, aping a calmness he did not feel; "but I am not surprised, nor will any one be, I presume, with whom you are acquainted. My sister is of age. We have done our best to prevent what in itself is undesirable. Am I to understand that Mrs. Buck in adopting your name has also adopted your particular religious views?"

"Not at all, not at all," said Mr. Buck, vacantly. He was not prepared for so cool a reception. "Mrs. Buck expressly stipulated that she should be allowed to attend her own church on alternate Sundays, and after consultation with friends it was allowed."

"I congratulate you, Sara," said Florian sadly, for this smote cruelly on his heart. "We have done our duty towards you. I hope you will be happy. I am going to-morrow for good, so good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Sara, shedding a few tears. Her shallow soul was beginning to see that her brother's generous nature and high motives had been sadly misunderstood.

"I was intending to bring you with me," Florian continued smiling, "and have you preside over my house; but that plan must be laid aside. You will excuse me now, Mr. Buck; I am busy."

The incident had a depressing effect on Florian beyond the power of words to tell. He had mas-

tered himself very thoroughly at a trying moment, but physical weakness added itself to his mental desolation, and left this new sorrow very hard to bear. His packing was ended before night, however, and, having despatched his boxes to the depot, he went on foot around the bay to Squire Pendleton's. The Squire was in his study smoking, and listened to Florian's tale with much commiseration and delight.

"It's a great pity your father didn't meet them," said he. "It's a reflection on the family to have such a goose in it. Here, Ruth, come in and hear the news."

Ruth came to the door at her father's shout.

"You couldn't guess," said the Squire. "Sara's gone an' done it at last; married the parson last night."

Ruth was shocked so violently that she grew quite pale, and stammered out :

"I knew they would marry, but Linda's death, I thought, would make a difference. Poor Linda!"

"That hurt me most," said Florian, with a wan smile; "but it was done very respectably. The whole congregation was called in and consulted. If they did not marry then, while we were taken up with sorrow, it might become impossible to marry at all. The circumstances as they saw them justified the action.

"I am going to-morrow," he added. He was glad to have this opportunity of speaking to Ruth alone, and of discovering, possibly, whether fate had any more stones to throw at him.

"I knew you could not endure life here," she replied with much feeling, "after so many sorrows."

"The one thing I most regret is that I cannot bring you with me, Ruth. You must know," he went on hurriedly, "that a very little time should decide for you and me whether we part or unite forever. In a year, if you say it, I will come back for you, Ruth."

"I fear I can never say it," she answered quite calmly; "and I fear too, we have been wrong in expecting confidently what it is God's alone to give. I have studied your faith, and I find I have a liking for it. It is beautiful indeed, but it does not seem to me to be the true one."

Fate had thrown its last missile. He was unable to speak for a few minutes.

"There is a year yet," he said at length; "you can decide better at the end of that time, perhaps."

"Perhaps," she repeated. She was very calm, simply because she had gone over this scene many a time in the past few months. "But I think it would be better to end now."

He was so pale when she looked at him that her good sense faltered.

"Have we ever really loved each other?" said he brokenly. "Do you know, Ruth, that if you persist we shall never meet again."

"I know it," said she. "I will wait for a year, if you wish. We have been always under a restriction, you know, and I feel as if it made truth harder for me to learn, because you were to be the reward of my lesson."

"I release you," he said, rising. "I release you, Ruth, from any obligation to me. You are right—you always were. Good-bye—forever."

They shook hands, and with this simple ceremony his first love ended. Was he tempted to go back to his paradise and take her as she stood, difference of faith included? The thought did occur to him, as would the thought of flying. With a sad smile at its impossibility he faced the dying storm. His feet turned unconsciously to the grave in the churchyard, and falling upon it, he moaned:

"O Linda! all our good fortune went with you."

"Not all," said the hermit's voice near by.

He looked up and saw Scott. He was covered with the falling snow, and must have been out long in the storm. Feeling ashamed of such a display of weakness, Florian rose and staggered away in silence. What the hermit never before did he did then—stopped the youth and held him.

"You're not yourself, my lad," he said, with a touch of tenderness in his voice. "And I am told you're goin' away to-morrow."

"Yes," said Florian, "to-morrow. Thank God! I'm done with this place forever. There is nothing here for me but graves. You see, Scott, I have lost them all—Linda, Sara, and Ruth. And the one nearest to me—isn't it strange?—is the little girl in her grave. Yes, I am going, and I wish it was morning and the whole place out of my thoughts for good. I don't care if I were dead."

"There's a difference between dead and dying," said Scott grimly. "You'd soon change your mind if death caught you. You forgot to give me that paper——"

"I'll write it this very night," Florian answered; "my last will and testament of the old life, and

then hurrah for the new. God! how completely we can be torn up from the roots and transplanted in new soil."

"Bosh!" said Scott. "You kin no more git rid of the old life than of yourself. You'll think of all these things for years, an' you'll find them three women, an' the water, an' islands, an' boats, an' things, twistin' in your thoughts and promptin' your will until yer dead—almost. You're a *leetle* apt to get sentimental."

Florian said nothing, a sudden daze came over his senses and he leaned heavily against the hermit, with his face upturned to the snow-clouded sky; and it so happened that the hermit's beard brushed his chin and the weather-beaten cheek lay for an instant against his own.

"Faintin', hey," said Scott. "You'll have a spell of sickness."

"Not at all. I was thinking of Linda's last words. They are a good motto as well as a prayer: 'That we may meet again.' Good-night, Scott, and good-bye. As usual, you are right. The old life shall not out for the new."

He went hurriedly down the road.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A BOHEMIAN.

THE attic chamber of Madame De Ponsonby Lynch's fashionable boarding-house had one window with a view of all the back windows of the neighboring block in its panes and a strip of exceedingly plain sky above. On clear days the North River was in sight, but at other times nothing till night came and stars or moon threw a glamour over the scene. Moonlight falling on the staring backs of tenement-houses is not a thrilling sight; but shimmering through the attic window, faintly lighting up its meager furniture, mixing lights and shadows fancifully until the narrow space becomes a stately castle-hall—then the moonlight is a blessing. It had that effect in this particular attic, and, although the air was cold enough to show the breath floating on it, where the light fell it looked warm, and almost persuaded Paul Rossiter that he was warm and had not sense enough to know it. A spectral bed with a white coverlet stood in one corner, a chair and desk littered with papers in another, and a stove sat reproachfully in the middle place, colder than the moonlight and darkly pensive. It had an apologetic air that it should be there at all on a cold night when a stove has most to say and do in this world, and be as silent and moody as Othello with his occupation gone. There was one picture on the wall, otherwise



bare. Some clothes hung on the rack stretched across the door. These and the moonlight were all Paul Rossiter's possessions, and he surveyed them cheerfully while blowing his cold fingers and drumming his cold feet on the floor. He was writing, and writing was food and heat to him—that is, when his manuscripts were exchangeable for silver. Unfortunately they did not always have that property. A sudden and imperative knock at the door startled him.

"Open the door, b'y," said a rough, deep, middle-aged voice outside. "I know ye're in, sure the key's in the door. It's me, Peter, and I have something to tell ye."

A long silence succeeded this outburst.

"No admission to Peter!" said the voice in a mock soliloquy. "Then, as sure's me name's Carter I'll expose ye. D'ye think I don't know why you are keeping me out, hey? D'ye think I don't know ye've no fire, or——"

There was a sudden hurrying of feet, and in an instant the voice, or Peter Carter, as he called himself, was violently pulled into the room. The lamp which he carried went out in the roughness of the encounter.

"Do you wish to blazon me all through the house," said Paul hotly; "do you——"

"There was no other way of getting in," said Peter; "and then ye needn't be so proud. Not a soul but knows the poor young man in the attic is as poor as the poetry he writes, an' freezes as often as he composes! Not that they respect ye any the less, for if ye were rich as Cræsus a poet's a hybrid thing in New York. Let me light the lamp."

Peter having performed this operation successfully, relit his pipe and sat down in the glare of the light, composed and happy. He was a short, stout, bow-legged man of fifty, with a bullet head and a moon-like face. His hair, short and gray, stood straight as quills, his under lip protruded, a scar half-way between tip and bridge of his pug nose gave that feature of his face an ugly prominence, but his eyes were large and blue and sharp looking, and would have been handsome but for the smoky eyeballs. Peter's general appearance was that of a red-faced, hearty farmer given to social courtesies and rolling in happiness. He was round-limbed and round-bodied, rolled in his walk like a sailor, was fond of a good song, a good story, and a good glass of punch. He took his seat, smiling at the angry, yet half-amused face, which Paul had turned on him.

"Be George, Paul," he said, with a malevolent grin, "but ye're the very spit of a poet, with your long, yellow hair, and blue eyes an' melancholy face! An't ye, b'y? It's nice to look at ye, it is. An' sure it's not mad ye are? Ye mightn't have let me in if ye didn't want to! I don't ask to come inter your old freezing room when I have one myself twice as good an' warm. I'll go now, if ye say so."

He made a pretended start and flourish with his legs, but did not move, and his jovial leer failing to charm the frown from the young man's face, he grew indignant.

"Well, stay mad if ye are so. What the devil do I care for you or your madness? D'ye s'pose I owe anything to you or to the likes o' ye? Not a snap of me finger, ye half-starved verse-molder."

"But it's too bad, Peter," said the poet, "that you should let the whole house know I had no wood——"

"Ah, bother, man! What d'ye care for the whole house, or the whole block, or the whole city! Sure they know it already. And it's your own fault that ye haven't wood and candles! Plenty o' money, b'y, in this old sheepskin o' mine! Call on Peter any time you are in want o' fifty dollars, an' it's yours. Plenty o' money all over the world, plenty to eat at Madame Lynch's.

Never think of to morrow :  
With a smile banish sorrow."

"I was thinking," said Paul gravely, "that I *would* borrow a little from you"—Peter looked suddenly indifferent—"and if you could let me have five dollars to buy some wood and necessities I wouldn't mind."

"Wood and necessities," mocked Peter gayly—"nice things for a young man like you, with strong muscles and warm blood, to be thinkin' of. I tell ye you are twice healthier in a room like this than if ye had a stove blazing up to heaven. And candles hurt the eyes! Ye shouldn't read after daylight, or use the eyes at all. See, now? Doctor Brown says that the man who uses his eyes——"

"That isn't the point," Paul interrupted. "I asked you for five dollars."

"Doctor Brown says that the man——"

"No, no; stick to the point, Peter; will you lend me the five dollars?"

"Lend ye five dollars?" said Peter, with a surly

air. "Ye're mighty anxious to run in debt, ain't ye? An' I'd look well lendin' a man money that can't pay Madame Lynch his board. I have enough to do to support meself. Go and write for the newspapers something plain an' sensible on the Know-nothings or—or—Ireland—there's a grand subject for ye—an' leave off reading an' writing stuff! There's a pattern for ye on the first floor—the young lawyer, only been in the city a year, is spoken of for Assemblyman already. He looks like ye, every one says so. May be you are related?"

Paul sat eying his companion with amused disdain.

"I heard the assertion made about the lawyer's likeness to me," said he, "but I have never seen him. Now let us see how much of a resemblance there is between us. I have yellow hair, blue eyes, light complexion; what has he?"

"Brown hair, brown eyes, and light complexion," said Peter hesitatingly.

"I wear a mustache, and my nose is Grecian as well as my face."

"He wears a full, short beard, and his nose is straight, if that's what you call Grecian, Paul."

"Where's the resemblance, then?"

"I don't know; I don't think there's any. When you come to particulars you have us all. I thought you might like to know him. Be George, Paul! he might get ye a lift on some paper, for he's a rising man, makes speeches that take down the ward meetings. You'd like to know him, you would. He's a Catholic of the strict kind, I think. Sure I know ye wouldn't like that, but a little of your com-

pany, poetry, and my punch would soon cure him of pious leanings. Come down now, an' I'll introduce you."

"Go ahead," said Paul, "I'm ready."

Peter bounded off his chair and seized the lamp.

"The lawyer has Saturday night to himself," said he. "But do you stay here till I see if he's in."

He went down the stairs with a slow step and a sober air, as if the task of visiting the strange lawyer was not a pleasant one; and Paul, watching him until the light had faded to the first floor, saw him stand hesitatingly there, then retreat and return a few times, and finally go slowly to his own room.

"O thou mass of contradiction!" he soliloquized, leaning over the stairway, and returned to his cold room to resume his writing, and blow his fingers and stamp his feet, and draw inspiration from the moonlight, which shone more brilliantly as the night strengthened. A twenty-cent piece lying on the table gave him a new thought.

He donned his overcoat and went out hastily. Down on the first floor he met Peter just coming out of the lawyer's room, his face aglow with pleasure. He seized Paul suddenly and with a jerk landed him inside the door.

"Here's the twin," said he. "Be George! I've fixed it all, an' I'll leave it to your own mothers if ye aren't as like as sun an' moon. Wallace, this is Rossiter, an' I'm Carter, an' we'll raise—That's right, Paul; make yourself at home."

The two gentlemen thus roughly brought together smiled and acknowledged the introduction.

"Here we are," said Peter recklessly, "transported

from a garret to a palace"—Paul stared—"and all on account of the resemblance between a poet and a politician! Paul, it's pretty complete, isn't it? It must be a nice thing to be a politician to afford such luxuries, and not poor devils like you and me, writin' bad poetry and editorials—hey, b'y? Don't ye feel proud of it?" said he, turning to Florian.

"Very," said Florian, "since you think so highly of it."

There's only one thing lacking," said Peter—"it's rather dry." And he twirled his thumbs and laughed at his own audacity. Florian began at once to understand his visitor, and without further ceremony placed wine and brandy convenient to Peter's elbow.

"Shall I help you to some wine?" he said politely.

"Wine!" said Peter, with a cough. "Ah, bother, man! what d'ye think I'm made of? Well, yes, I think I will, if ye say so," he added, seeing that Florian had poured it out quietly. "I dunno, though. Had I better, Paul? Paul, the pensive and poetical, with his long face and yellow hair! I don't think I will. I won't. It's late, an' it isn't good to be drinkin' before goin' to bed!"

Florian, amused, assisted Paul to some wine, and drank without saying more to Peter, who sat with his thumbs crossed and a gloomy expression on his spongy face.

"I am glad to have met you," said Florian. "Press of business only prevented me from introducing myself long ago. I heard so often of our peculiar resemblance that I was curious to see you, and no doubt you had similar feelings."

"Yes, indeed," said Paul; "and I often thought

it strange we should have been months in the same house without meeting."

"There's a wide distance between the garret and the best parlor," Peter broke in; "an' seeing ye haven't the politeness to ask the old fellow, I'll take on my own account a mouthful. I hold a middle place," he added, as he held up his glass to the light and eyed it tenderly. "I'm the ground, as it were, on which ye two meet and exchange views of each other. Well, here's to your future joys an' sorrows; may the wan strangle the other—m!"

The last sound was the expression of Peter's satisfaction as the fiery liquid, swelling in his throat, bulged his round eyes outward; he shook his legs once or twice and then burst into a roar of laughter. His rough good-humor and oddities went very far to put the young men on an instant and happy level of confidence. It was impossible to sit so near a fire and not get warm, and in a very short time all stiffness was gone and they were talking with the freedom and assurance of old friends. Meanwhile Peter fell asleep.

"Since our friend is gone the way of slumber," said Florian, "would you mind taking a walk before bedtime?"

"With all my heart," Paul answered. "Let Peter stay just where he is till we return. He's an odd old fellow, isn't he? And yet so kindly and jolly that you will forget annoying oddities and faults for the sake of his company."

They had an animated talk from the boarding-house to the Battery, and came quite unexpectedly on the open space out on the bay—so suddenly that

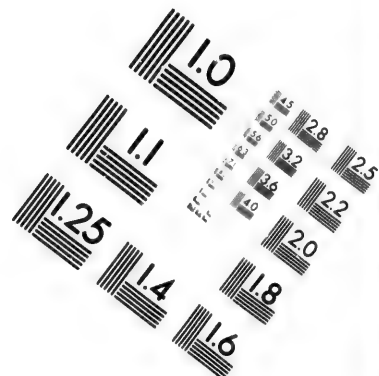
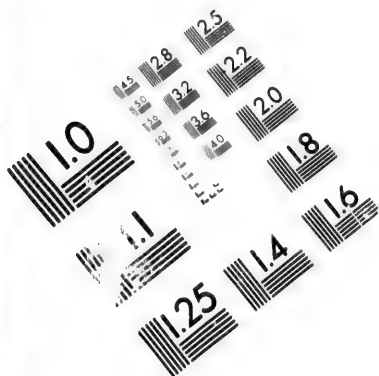
an abrupt pause in the flow of talk passed unobserved, and in an instant the minds of both were far away from each other and the scene. Whatever Paul's thoughts might have been, Florian at least found himself looking with inward eye over the St. Lawrence on such a night as this with feelings of sorrow for the "might-have-been." The waters of the bay were tumbling about in rude, irregular fashion, like boys at play, and across them floated spectral vessels and dark shadows. At this hour the same moon was shining on a waste of ice and snow in Clayburgh. The lights twinkled among the snow-covered houses, and far away the islands stood dark and ghostly. Scott was there in his loneliness, reading in his cabin, or spearing pickerel by the light of a fire; and Ruth, the dear girl! well, it was a little foolish, perhaps, to rankle the old wound for the sake of reminiscence.

They returned home still talking, and parted at Florian's door. "I am not here one-third of my time," said he to Paul as he bade him good-night. "My library is exceptionally good, and if you will take advantage of it the premises are yours every day while I am absent."

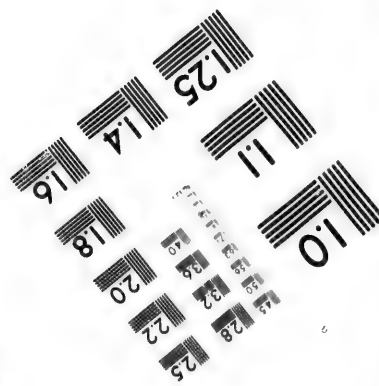
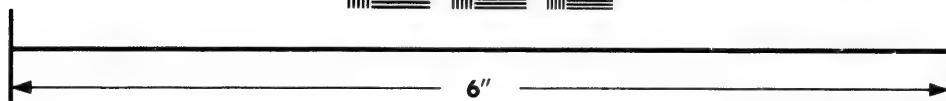
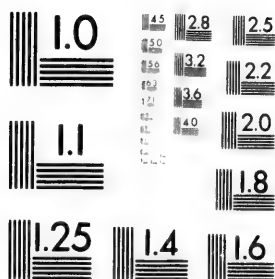
Paul, thanking him warmly, accepted the kindness. On the second floor he met Peter with a lamp in his hand and a handful of coppers.

"Ye asked me for five dollars, b'y," said Peter sleepily; "would ye mind taking it in coppers?"



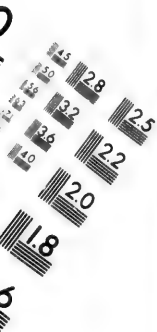


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## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE PORTRAIT ON THE WALL.

IN Florian's room Paul now passed a great part of his leisure time, finding among the volumes scattered there his greatest pleasures. It surprised him to see that very little distinction was made with regard to the orthodoxy of writers in the selection of books. Infidelity and Protestantism were well represented on the shelves, and volumes whose poisonous properties seemed almost to destroy their own pages with virulence and bigotry were common. He spoke of it wonderingly to Florian.

"Well," said Florian, "I found, on coming here and plunging into politics, that it would be useful to be acquainted with all literature as well as the Catholic purely, and that our enemies had a side to the argument which might be worth knowing. So I bought everything that came in my way, and read it merely for the sake of knowing personally the strong and weak points of an opponent. I can tell you it is a great help, and particularly in politics and society."

"But wouldn't you be afraid a little to handle such poisons? Our faith, after all, is as much an object of temptation as our purity, and must be well guarded. Nothing so easy to lose, nothing so hard to recover, as faith."

"If this is the best argument the enemies of our

faith have," waving his hand toward the bookcase, "I shall never lose it. Of course I would not recommend the reading of such books to every one, but in political life it is almost a necessity to know these things if you expect to rise."

"And you expect, of course," laughed Paul.

"Some day," said Florian, "I shall be—well, never mind what, but you shall write my epic, and like Achilles, I shall go down to posterity embalmed in verses immortal."

Nevertheless, the poet would have been more pleased with a library less dangerous, for Florian's sake. As it was none of his business, he continued to enjoy the fine quarters of the lawyer during his absence at court and office, and was able to forget the garret a few hours every day. A boarder in a garret was a strange sight at a house so exclusive as Madame Lynch's. All the stranger that the poet was rarely able to pay his small dues in full or on time. He managed cleverly to keep in madame's good graces, and to keep out of her way. But he could not escape an explanation once the madame sent up her card with a request for an interview. She was a large woman physically, and, as far as fashionable disposition would allow, large hearted. She liked the yellow-haired poet, and was not at all anxious that he should pay his weekly dues. But Paul, though airy in his disposition, was retiring in his present circumstances and could not be forced into a tête-à-tête with a female while his clothes looked poorly; therefore she pretended a feeling of nervousness that he would run away without making payment for the attic, and was favored in

consequence with many ceremonious visits and many insights into Paul's character and circumstances which he never dreamed of giving her. He regarded her as a stout, hard-fisted old lady with a soft spot in her heart, which periodically he was bound to find; and congratulated himself on finding it regularly and succeeding thereby in keeping a respectable shelter over his unlucky head. Then Frances, her daughter, had a very sweet face and a bright disposition, and was not unwilling, with all his poverty, to talk literature occasionally and let him play on her piano when strangers were not present. The boarding-house was extremely select. Paul wondered that he ever had the audacity to apply for the garret at a place where presumably a garret would not exist; but in the first setting out on a literary life he had thought the time would be short until his means would more than match the best parlor in the house.

"O Mr. Rossiter!" was madame's first remark one day, when he entered in response to the usual invitation, "here I have waited another three days over the time, and yet I have to ask for another interview."

"And I am always willing to give it," said Paul reverently, "for I have nothing else to give."

"Well, well, well!" and she tapped her pencil on the desk, and put on her eye-glasses to examine the account for the twentieth time.

"I have taught all the gentlemen so to remember the right day that it seems hard to fail with you. Four weeks, Mr. Rossiter, and twenty dollars due."

"I'm sure I did my best," said he. "But these

people don't appreciate genius. If you were the publisher, now, madame, I would have no hesitation. You understand me, I think, and you would make others understand me. But in these hard matter-of-fact days poets will starve somewhat easier than in Queen Anne's time. I think of giving it up and going back to the country."

"It would be best," said madame, "but then there is no hurry. If you could oblige me with what is owing——"

Paul shook his head mournfully.

"How can you expect it," said he, "when a man gets but five dollars for the labor of weeks? If I choose to write poetry of the band-box kind—ten minutes' work, you know—or write sonnets on the editor's generosity, then I might earn a little. But I never will prostitute genius that way, not even to pay my debts."

"Is it prostituting genius to pay your debts?" said madame.

"Perhaps not," Paul answered. "I might shovel coal, and be dependent on no one save hospital charity, or wear my life out in a shop as clerk. But I only ask time, madame, only time, and as I paid in the past, so shall I pay you in the future. I need time."

"Money is so scarce," began madame, who liked to hear him plead.

"I have always heard the rich say that. Now, I think it plentiful, and it is. And how regularly you must get your money from your wealthy lawyers, and doctors, and statesmen. O madame! do you stand in such need of a paltry twenty dollars that

you call money scarce? And what would you do with your attic if I went? Poets are scarcer than dollars you know. And when shall you have the distinction of harboring a poet in your attic again? I know I am living too high for my means, and I must economize. If you could give me the attic for a certain sum, and let me board elsewhere, I think it would do very well."

Madame looked grave and seemed on the point of refusing, when Frances came in, but stopped, apologized, and was withdrawing.

"Come and plead for me," said Paul, who was a great favorite with the girl and knew it. "I have asked a favor, and your mother is going to say 'No.'"

"Just imagine, Frances," said madame calmly, "Mr. Rossiter wishes to retain his room and board elsewhere. Can we permit it?"

"Why not, mamma?" said she. "I know it is the rule to do differently, and that you have never broken it yet, but then——"

Not having any reason to offer, she stopped short and looked at Paul to continue. She was a simple-hearted girl, with remarkably bright, soft eyes, and her character clearly pictured in her frank face, which Paul in his weaker moments often allowed to weave itself into his fancies. He was young, however, and faces of this kind were apt to haunt him.

"But then," added she, "what will you do without your poet?"

"Has he ever been of any earthly use to us?" said madame with unusual severity. "Have we ever seen anything from his muse to justify his reputation?"

"I have," said Frances—"just the sweetest things." But Paul was suddenly downcast even under this criticism; for madame looked portentous, and "just the sweetest" was not the kind of poetry he looked upon as worthy of his genius.

"Well, I am not disposed to be too hard," said madame; "but if you ask favors, Mr. Rossiter, you must expect to grant them in turn."

"Certainly," said he, "that is not to be doubted."

"I shall permit you to retain the room, then, but I shall ask a favor of you soon—a reasonable one, mind, which I expect to have granted immediately."

Mr. Rossiter was missed thenceforward from the table, and, in addition to cold, want of light, and stinted means, he had now to undergo the daily martyrdom of a cheap lunch in cheap quarters, and among the cheapest sort of a crowd. Florian's rooms and library made his hardships light, however, and he reveled in the luxury and elegance that was really so only by contrast with the bare garret.

Among the pictures which hung on the walls was one that brought a sudden surge of feeling to the poet's heart; a sketch of Clayburgh bay and the distant islands under the sun of a spring morning. A boat was putting off from the shore. A young man stood at the bow arranging some ropes, while in the stern were two girls in yachting costume, whose sweet faces seemed to be looking smilingly into one's own. The dark haired, dark-eyed witch in white was waving a handkerchief coquettishly at an unseen observer; her companion, hands clasped over one knee, was looking dreamily in the same direction. With this face the poet was captivated,



and recognized it in a more animated description of a face, which, hanging over the bookcase, had already won his heart and begun to trouble his dreams. He mused over it often and wove fancies concerning the maid.

A few months of companionship placed him and the politician on a footing of intimacy, and started those confidences between the friends which make such an intimacy so delightful. Soon Florian looked on Paul as a young man of poetic talent, perhaps genius, with delicate sentiments and fondness for the ideal—a man who would make a good friend, but not a very useful one, since he was of that sort which expects every one to be useful to them, and who indeed reflect a glory on their helpers. That idea of utility was getting to be a very powerful one with him. As to the past life of Paul he never thought but once, and his conclusion was that the youth had come up as a flower, cared for tenderly, without much experience, doomed to make no impression on the world except to add to its momentary beauty. He had no past, in fact, that could have left any bitter traces on his soul.

Paul thought Florian a genius of a high order and looked up to him; a man with a powerful array of statistics in his head; who could get up at a moment's notice, and cool, self-possessed, clear-headed, talk sound sense for an hour; whose aim was already the presidency, if he never said as much, and who was beginning in the right way to reach it; who was clearly a gentleman of the very highest order, inasmuch as adherence to principle and religion was added to outward courtesy of a superior kind. It

pleased the poet to discover that Florian had a past of which he did not like to speak, and of which there were many traces in his character. When he looked at the yachting picture Paul saw two expressions in his face that were eloquent of a misery somewhat softened by time. When his gaze rested on the portrait on the bookcase he saw the same look of pain succeeded by one of resignation, and even of hope. Quickly and justly the youth formed his conclusions. There was a resemblance in Florian to the girl who stood in the yacht waving her handkerchief, and probably she was a relative whom some misfortune had snatched from him forever. But as to the other, who had no resemblance to him, she was perhaps his affianced, and circumstances which he hoped to overcome kept them apart. Paul laughed a little at his own inferences and the pain which the last one in particular gave him.

He was right in judging that Florian's hopes still centered on the girl whose picture hung over the book-case. Politics and the women he had met were as yet unable to disturb the gentle sway of her, who for truth's sake had put aside her love for him, and, though in error as to her creed, was not one whit less devoted to principle than he, a Catholic, sharing in the possession of all truth. Sometimes the thought intruded on him that it would have been as well to have dropped that condition of their love, and to have married her first and converted her afterwards; but, apart from its unfairness to her, he had laid down the principle that mixed marriages were hurtful and he would not—what? Suppose now that there was an opportunity of renewing their former

relations, and Ruth was yet obstinate in her belief, would he not be unwise to lose—what? Florian saw that he was stumbling against the rocks of conscience, and looked up at those sweet faces in the yacht, while the tears came into his eyes and his heart gave a great throb of pain. One was dead and the other worse than dead to him unless—what?

His relations with Ruth, he had to admit, were not of the most hopeful kind. In two years he had not exchanged words or letters with her, and from the various reports which acquaintances from Clayburgh incidentally gave him he could see that she had settled down to the new life with her usual good sense and determination to forget the past. It appeared, too, that she had become literary in her tastes, and was a welcome contributor to many publications. As far as his hopes were concerned it seemed ridiculous, yet absence might have done considerable for him. He knew she once held him dear, and Ruth was not quick to forget. If he had kept her image in his heart through all the blandishments of society, through all the turmoil of political life and the hard study of his profession, was it not more likely that in the noble solitude of the north, amid scenes the more dear because he had once lived amongst them, with Linda's grave on the hillside to remind her of the child's fondest wishes, his image would fade more slowly from her mind, and the old love die harder in her heart? Perhaps she was entertaining them with the same hopes that shared his loneliness, and the quiet study and prayer of those years of separation might have led her so near to the fold that to marry her would bring her safely in. On the other hand,

he remembered, with a sigh, Ruth's rigid conscientiousness, which would make it a duty to dismiss every thought of him from her mind until time would allow her to look upon him merely as a friend. She had no claim on him, and that was enough. The dead heart of Linda would not beat more coldly than hers when they met again if this last supposition was correct, and yet he prayed Linda's prayer the more fervently as all these doubts crowded on him, "that we may meet again."

At all events, Florian was beginning to feel that to marry was becoming for him a political necessity. Social prominence, he thought, required an immediate and advantageous marriage. He cared very little for wealth, and his bride need have for her dower no more than the graces which make a woman popular—beauty, fine carriage, a mind above the average, and respectable birth. Ruth had all these, and what a joy to him if his ambition could follow whither his heart led! But if not, what was he to do? There were other women in the world with some of the necessary qualifications, and Frances Lynch was one of them. Her mother had been a noted belle in her time, and enjoyed the friendship of remarkable men and women. A De Ponsonby keeping a boarding-house was a little irregular, but such a boarding-house! Only the lights of society and intellect gained admittance within its portals; and madame, although guilty of a blunder in marrying an Irishman with some brains, good birth, and moderate fortune, never lost her power in the world of society on that account. Frances inherited her mother's wit and beauty. Now that she appeared to

him in the light of a possible wife, he began to perceive that she had made a deep impression on him. She was slight and willowy in form, with a woman's full height, and a quiet grace of manner. He remembered how transparent her face was, and how delicate its outline; how the sunlight gleamed through her yellow hair; the sweetness of her voice; the beauty of her mouth, teeth, and smile; the gentleness and womanliness of her disposition, and her winning and candid ways. He had to admit that beside her Ruth seemed quite plain. And, moreover, Frances was a Catholic and very devout, to all appearances. What her faults were he did not know, as he never looked for them. It seemed a little odd, even to his present changed conditions of thought, that before the old hopes died he should thus be looking for an object on which to found new ones, but it was an old trick with his calculating nature, which political habits had intensified.

If any one noticed the few special attentions he paid to Frances after these meditations, no comment was excited. Yet Peter Carter was filled with rage and suspicion over them, and as soon as he might rushed in to madame with unbecoming haste and fury.

"I told ye," said Peter, as he sat down familiarly in madame's easy chair, "that ye never would know how to bring up a child, and that ye never deserved to have one, with your curls an' pomade, an' poke-bonnets, an' furb'lowes, an' trimmings, an' nonsense. I told ye, and now you are going' to reap the reward o' your sins."

"What is the matter now?" said madame calmly.

"Matter now!" grunted Peter. "Modesty was a quality of most women I knew, but your daughter hasn't any—a mere bundle of fashions; an' I won't stand it any longer. Am I going to see her damned and not say a word?"

"What difference will it make to you?" said madame sneeringly.

"Sporting with that lawyer below, the—the witch. He making faces at her an' she softening him with music. He that has no more heart than a stone. It's a gizzard he has! An' he won't be a Catholic within ten years, he's such a poor one now. I tell ye I won't stand it!"

"Evidently you have a grievance of some kind," said madame: "pray, what is it? And, if you can, speak plainly."

"I've seen through ye, ma'am;" and Peter leered at the elegant lady. "I've seen through your daughter too; an' I know you are just dying to get the lawyer into the family. But I swear if she tries it I'll blow on you! And I'll go to him myself an' tell him the whole thing."

"Wait a minute," said madame sternly.

"Wait a minute!" snapped Peter, but he recognized the tone which madame used, and kept growling in a prudent minor key. "Wait! I'll be hanged if I wait one second."

"There's a little debt of yours just sent me this morning," said madame, "and I was trying to decide whether it would be better to pay it or stop it out of your monthly allowance."

"Oh!" said Peter, slightly confused.

"And, then, Mrs. Brown was here this morning

to tell me her front room is vacant, and I thought it wiser that you should remove yourself there, for you are getting too coarse for this elegance."

"Elegance be hanged!" said Peter warmly. "What do I care for you and your elegance? I'll go to Mrs. Brown's, if ye wish me to, or to the devil."

"Don't hurry," said madame graciously; "you'll meet your old friend soon enough."

"But I'll ruin ye, I'll ruin ye!" he stormed. "I'll tell the whole story to the lawyers, poets, and greatness, I will, and end your fine plotting."

"There are some papers here," said madame, "which I will read for you. You need quieting, you foolish man. And if it is necessary to remove you from Mrs. Brown's front room, your next journey, I fear, will be to prison."

"Oh!" said Peter, collapsing suddenly. "But sure you are not goin' to send me to Mrs. Brown's; ye wouldn't turn out an old man from such comfortable quarters!"

"You are so boisterous when you drink," said madame: "you make so many threats, you interfere so unwarrantably in the affairs of strangers, that really——"

"I'm not boisterous," Peter asserted, "and I never in my whole life made threats to any one. Did I make threats?" he added, innocently. "'Pon my honor I was dreaming, an' had no more idea of the meaning' o' what I said than the man in the moon. I'll say nothing. I'll be quiet as a lamb. I won't open my mouth good or bad, if ye say so. But of course ye'll excuse my anxiety for Paul. It was Paul I

was thinking of, for I knew he was in love with Frances; and he's such a beautiful creature, an' it isn't fair that the lawyer should have everything, as ye must admit yerself when ye come to think of it."

"Did Paul tell you as much?" said madame indifferently, plunging into some papers.

"Of course he did!" said Peter vehemently. "Well—I won't say he did, after all; but his actions said it, and then he's a poet an' couldn't help falling in love with such a little beauty. No, I don't think he did say anything. I needn't mind going to Mrs. Brown's?"

"Not yet," said madame slowly, "but I shall keep this debt out of your monthly allowance."

"Don't!" said Peter, with gloomy earnestness; but the lady was inexorable, and he went off convinced that whatever he turned his hand to, whether for good or evil to himself or others, was sure to end in a mass of chaotic bitter ruin.



## CHAPTER IX.

### RUTH.

WHILE the years were passing with noisy flight for Florian, one woman was enjoying in Clayburgh a peace of heart none the less assured and real that it had been won after much suffering. When Florian went Ruth had found his absence a very keen pain, almost impossible to bear, but then the battle had been fought and won long before their actual separation, when it had first become plain to her that she could not accept the Catholic faith. She had been very calm in announcing her determination, because the scene had already been enacted in imagination many times, but after his departure she fought a new battle with herself, winning quietly and passing into a life of gentle calm that nothing else seemed able to disturb. As Florian had supposed, her strict conscientiousness had swept from her heart every vestige of the love she once had for him. His appearance to-morrow in Clayburgh, with or without a wife, would have been a pleasure to her, not an occasion of regret and expectation, as it would have been for him. He had fallen into that ridiculous position which a rejected lover finds it so hard to assume, that of the trusted friend of the woman he would have made his wife. Often she visited the grave on the hill,

and wept bitter tears over this one sorrow of her life. It seemed so hard to believe Linda was dead. The whole scene was instinct with her presence. Hers had been the earliest laugh to greet the spring, and hers the first tears that bewailed the death of the flowers and the coming of the long winter. But who would have disturbed the sweet sleep of the girl? and who would have called thee back, Linda, from the smile of God, even if they had the power?

The report which reached Florian that Ruth had devoted herself to literary work was true, and of late she began to reap so much success and profit from her venture that a new idea, presented to her by an outsider for consideration, took her fancy very much. A relative and her husband had visited Clayburgh the previous summer, and urged on Ruth the propriety of coming to New York during the winter, or at any time that suited her convenience, and making the acquaintance of the literary celebrities of the day.

"We have them all at our receptions," said Mrs. Merrion; "and we are so gratified to hear them speak of you in terms of high praise. You will receive an ovation, and think of the pleasure and profit it would be to you to hold sweet converse with them."

"Well, Barbara," said Ruth, who thought her relative's adjectives a little silly, "your offer is tempting, and I shall consider it during the winter. But I could not think of leaving Clayburgh at present. Next year, perhaps, I may go down to hold *sweet* converse with your literary stars."

And Mrs. Merrion perceived from the unnecessary

emphasis that Ruth was laughing at her. However, Ruth thought deeply on the matter and finally proposed it to her father, who was delighted with the idea of being in Florian's neighborhood for a time, and suggested shutting up the house at once and setting off on their journey. She went first to hear the hermit's opinion on it, and took Mrs. Winifred Wallace with her. It was a bitter cold day, and the open sleigh in which they were seated afforded a fine view of the vast stretches of ice that lay away from them for miles, and of the islands between, sullen and gloomy like life-prisoners in Siberia. When they reached the island they left the stage at the house of a friend and procured another conveyance to take them eastward to the narrow channel opening into Eel Bay. They crossed the ice on foot to a dark wood, where a few maples with dead leaves clinging to the bare branches made a great stir like the chuckling of many skeletons. Through this they went by a path evidently frequented of late, and so beaten down as to make the wood passable, and finally came out on a bluff which showed the hermit's house a short distance off, with a light in the window. It was a cloudy and gloomy day, and Scott was at home, with a bright fire burning in the chimney-place and his solitary candle lit, while Izaak Walton lay open at a well-thumbed page that brought back a fresher memory of the brightness and sweetness of the summer. He was surprised at the appearance of the two women, but politely invited them to sit down and remove their wraps, while he put a fresh log on the fire and showed a bachelor's feverish desire to set things in order. Ruth was in the habit of call-

ing on him as often as she thought her presence would not be too intrusive, but she had never disturbed his retreat during the winter, and perhaps he thought this visit a mere freak of inquisitiveness. Mrs. Winifred was uneasy, and made most wretched attempts to seem commonplace and ordinary, looking about her with the air of meek terror that used to provoke the anger of Linda and Florian because of its ludicrous side. Ruth and the hermit paid her no attention.

"It was a mere notion, you know," the girl was explaining to Scott, as she sat in the blaze with her hands clasped over her knee, "for I could have waited until you came to town and explained it to you then; but an idea seized me like an apoplexy, and I must come down without delay. I have not seen you in a long time, and I was and am thinking of going to New York." She was looking at him very closely as she said this, sure the hermit would accuse her in thought of going after Florian, and would look at her once with his keen blue eyes. He was as interested as if she had stated her destination to be Timbuctoo.

"It's a fine place, New York," he said quietly; "but why need all the blood rush to the heart?"

"It must all pass through it," said she, taking up the figure with a smile, "or else be cast aside! You see, I would not go to stay, but only to make a few friends among the great thinkers and writers and poets. It would be something to know them, would it not?"

"O yes! it does one good to meet a great person, I think; but, then, they needn't be all bookish folks,

There are great people in the garrets and cellars of a big city an' in the work-shops."

"You were never in a great city," said she, and repented of the words immediately. "Pray do not answer that," she broke in. "It was not meant to pry into your affairs. It was an accident. But what do you think? Is it wise for me to go? I have won a little fame by writing, and I would so like to know great minds. Then there are great doctors of theology and eminent Catholics there. Who knows but that I might get some light from them."

He shook his head and smiled a little.

"I understand," said she. "I know to what you refer. Well, I *have* prayed and prayed, and yet light will not come. I have tried to be content with Methodism and I can't, nor can I find rest in any other faith."

"It is a time of doubt with you," said the hermit, "and that means change. I dunno as great minds will help ye much; mostly it's the little minds do God's work, an' bring peace and rest."

"Well, I'll visit the garrets and cellars, and hunt up little minds, and see the great people too."

"Them fine writers an' thinkers," said Scott seriously, "have a mighty high opinion o' themselves, an' look at religion pretty often in queer ways. They kind o' handle it as a jeweler handles a watch. They've got the secret o' the thing, an' don't think much of it. They give ye a doubt about it sometimes, unless ye get the 'umble ones that thinks more o' their neighbor than they do o' themselves. I've met some of 'em fishin,' an' they were too green for anything. They didn't like to be told so, either."

"Then would you say go, Scott?" she persisted.

"Would I say go? Well, if great minds is the only trouble, an' religion, why, yes, go."

Somehow she was not so satisfied with his answer, and sat staring into the fire, wondering. Was there anything else that should trouble her save religion and the great minds? There was the rush and whirl of polite society, but it never could entangle her, and then—Florian. She looked at Scott. He was reading Walton, and Mrs. Winifred was watching him shyly as a curiosity. Why should he have put in the *if*? Did he think the old trouble would begin again? She was not afraid of herself; but then what security was there for Florian? She had often wondered if he had given up the old love as completely as she had, and, knowing his fond disposition, feared he had not. Would not her presence excite it more violently and more hopelessly, and was that what the hermit meant? The silence grew so profound that Mrs. Winifred felt called upon to say something.

"From what I've heard of big cities," said she, "seemingly nothing troubles the girls there but their dress and beaux."

"Yes," said Scott, looking at her with an expression of severe reproach in his eyes, which puzzled Ruth, "beaux?"

"Do you think my presence, Scott, would annoy Florian?"

"I do," said the hermit, as if he had been expecting the question. "I think he never got over losin' you, an' it would kind o' stir him up to see you again."

"Is that a good reason for me to remain away from New York or any other place?"

"Not if ye care nothin' for him." And seeing she did not perceive what injury her presence could be to Florian, he went on a little hurriedly, as if it annoyed him to speak of these things:—"I know he's kind o' hoped agin' hope that ye'd come to him some time, as he'd like to, an' make up. It's been a help to him a long time, an' kept him out o' harm perhaps, or leastwise from gettin' away from the right. Politicians," he added, seeing that her look suggested a doubt as to Florian's getting off the path an inch, "get right an' wrong so mixed up with their own likin' that they don't allus do right even when they mean to. When he finds out ye're not in love with him any more, there won't be any holdin' to him. God only knows when he'll stop."

"I don't think you are quite correct in that," said Mrs. Winifred, with a boldness that frightened herself. "Florian, seemingly, was always one of the strict kind."

"Mebbe," said the hermit, resuming his book, while Ruth looked her absolute doubt of Scott's inferences eloquently.

"I hain't no pretensions to bein' a prophet," he said after a silence, "but it'll surprise me if Flory don't propose to ye again' down thar, an' offer to take ye jist as ye stand, atheist or Protestant, an' get mad enough to do wild things when ye refuse."

"How do you know I'll refuse?" said Ruth saucily.

"That's so," and Scott smiled. "You can't know

a woman two minutes at a time, an' I'm no wiser than other men."

"Well, I'll follow your advice"—the hermit had not given any, and looked at her—"and go. I'll avoid Florian, and see the great and the little minds of the great city, and pick up some grace that's lying for me there like money in a bank."

The hermit studied her attentively with his great blue eyes.

"Did it ever strike you," said he coldly, "that you might be playin' with grace, just as a man does with a stubborn fish amusin' hisself?"

"No," she interrupted loudly, and with such indignation that Mrs. Winifred uttered a faint cry. "Do not accuse me of that, Scott, never, never, accuse me of that."

He resumed his air of meek indifference at once.

"Yet, how do I know," she said humbly, "what sins I may or may not be guilty of? But in this matter I have been so much in earnest, so very much in earnest, and except in my methods I can find no blame."

She had no more to say, and Scott read his book in a way that politely invited their departure.

"Will you excuse me for one moment?" said she: "I am going to take a view of the river from the boulder before I go."

She went out and stood on the spot where Florian had knelt and prayed of mornings during his retreat, and dreamed and chatted of evenings. The scene was like the buried beauty of that happy time, risen from its grave in white, ghastly cerements, and the weird wind moan through the evergreens gave a



voice to the forlorn ghost. Would it never look otherwise to her again? Could she ever gaze upon the summer-scene that in time would banish this pale specter of the dead, with the same calm and joy and sweetness as when beside her stood Florian and Linda.

"If I cannot," said she, with sadness, "then change of heart will not be for the better."

When she came back, after ten minutes of looking and thinking and sighing, Mrs. Winifred was putting on her wraps, a trifle pale and tired, and very confused and frightened from her tête-à-tête with the hermit, and Scott was standing with his back to the fire, his hands behind him, and his chin in the air, as if an inspiration had seized him. But Ruth put no emphasis on such things, and bade him good-bye with a promise of seeing him again when she had come to a firm and conscientious determination. He went with them across the river and through the wood, with its chattering and shivering maples, and over the channel to where the horse and cutter still stood, and, as was his custom, stood facing them under the shadow of the wintry sky until they were out of sight.

"Can you conceive anything more lonely?" said Ruth; "that solitary man standing in such a solitude and going back through that gloomy wood to his home. How does he stand it?"

"I think him a saint," said Mrs. Winifred so emphatically that Ruth looked at her in surprise.

## CHAPTER X.

### A REUNION.

WHEN the Merriors had opened house for the fashionable season, Ruth and the Squire were received with open arms by the vivacious Barbara.

"The first thing I shall do," said Mrs. Merriion—"and oh! how fortunate you came along as you did, Ruth, for I was making my head ache with plans for something new and striking for my first event, and couldn't find anything to suit—the first thing I shall do is to have a music party and make it the earliest and best of the season. How can it be otherwise with such a star as you, so unique and so new?"

Ruth looked at Mrs. Merriion to see if the lady was in earnest in using such language, and found that she was. In earlier days, when Barbara Merriion was a girl at Clayburgh, she had been noted for her beauty, brilliancy, and boldness. It was the possession of these qualities which won for her a husband, a wealthy nonentity in the shape of Mr. Merriion, whose dull faculties had been quickened under the spell of the girl's dashing presence. Although a relative Ruth had no affection for her. There seemed such a want of thoughtfulness, and even of good principle, in her disposition that no amount of respectability and correct conduct could make up

for it in her eyes. And yet Mrs. Merrion was a model of behavior and very popular. How any one could pretend to be the star of an assemblage with her petite figure and shining face present, Ruth could not understand. Barbara's features were small, but of a fine and exquisite type. The delicate nose and dark eyes showed a high spirit, and reckless though trained disposition. Beside her Ruth felt like a slow, heavy being, a robin beside a humming-bird. While preparations were being made for her debut the Squire set out to look for Florian and to bring him over to afternoon tea, if possible. Mrs. Merrion was not acquainted with him, the Squire discovered, to his own intense disgust and astonishment. She had known him in a distant way as a good-looking boy, in Clayburgh, whom she had never patronized or spoken to simply because he was a boy of her own age and not "eligible."

"Pshaw!" said the Squire, "you don't mean to tell me that you've lived ten years in Brooklyn and are not acquainted with the handsomest and smartest fellow in New York City? Now, I didn't think it of you, I didn't."

"Why, Mr. Pendleton, qu'en voulez-vous?" She had a silly habit, but a very pretty one in her mouth, of using French phrases to any extent.

"Kan vully-voo!" repeated the Squire. "What nonsense! Don't be flying yer nasty French at me. I say it's queer—don't you, Ruth?—not to know Florian, the best, the smartest——"

"How can I know them all?" said Barbara plaintively. "There are so many clever, desirable people come and go, and these cities are so large. But if

you will bring him to lunch at three or dinner at six I shall be happy to know him."

"Of course you will," said the Squire, with a loud sneer. "But I won't bring him; you won't know him, since you didn't look him up before. Why, he and Ruth were going to be married once."

"Why, father!" said Ruth with an emphasis that startled the Squire into such a consciousness of his blunder that he got angry.

"Are you ashamed of it?" said he.

"No; but then it's unnecessary to speak of such things to every one," said Ruth disdainfully.

"Jest as you say," snapped the Squire. "But I'll bring him over, Barbery, and you can see jest what a fool Ruth can make of herself once every five years."

"Not oftener?" said Ruth maliciously. "Now if Barbara could see——"

"What a fool I can make of myself once a day, you want to say? Well, say it, and be hanged," said the Squire. "But I know a good man when I see him, and I'd hang on to him if I was a woman. So I'll bring him, Barbery, shall I?"

"By all means," said Barbara sweetly; "and perhaps we may arrange matters so that Ruth may not be so hard-hearted another time."

The Squire coming round in late September found Florian at home.

"How do, boy?" said he, poking through the half-open door his red, jovial face. Florian jumped as if shot, and paled, while the Squire roared and squeezed his hands again and again, and turned him round to look at him, and was full of delight and

surprise at the changes he saw. The noise the old man made attracted another red, jovial face to the door.

"Friends, b'y?" said Peter, recognizing an affinity. "May I come in?"

"Certainly," said the Squire. "Friend of yours, Flory?"

"Yes," said Florian, vexed, but glad of the intrusion, too. "This is Peter Carter, journalist, a good man in his way."

"Not at all," said Peter, wringing the Squire's hand fiercely, while Pendleton said:

"You've heard of old Pendleton, if you're a journalist—got mixed up with the two governments in Mackenzie's rebellion."

"Didn't I report the whole thing?" said Peter with enthusiasm—"the pursuit, the capture. Why, man, your life hung on a thread."

"Yes," cried the delighted Squire, hugging his thick throat with both hands; "but here was the thread, boy—here was the thread."

"Bedad, Florian this is quite an Irishman ye have for a friend, if I might judge from his sentiments—hey, b'y?"

"Irishman!" said the Squire. "More Irish than *he* is with his cool, political blood that'll stand anything and smile. I've known that boy, Carter, since he was born, almost, and he was just as cool then as he is now. Not enough blood in him to like anything weaker than liquid fire, and that only heated him. I tried to marry him to a daughter of mine once, but she wouldn't stand it—no, sir, wouldn't stand it."

"'Twas a great pity, now," said Peter seriously, for it struck him as being a handy way of getting rid of Florian's pretensions to Frances. "Ye missed it, b'y, didn't ye now."

"Rather," said Florian with an inward groan.

"But never mind, Carter," said the Squire, with a knowing wink of the highest confidence—"never you mind; I can arrange matters when I take 'em in hand, an' I'm going to take 'em."

"As Mr. Pendleton has but just arrived," said Florian in despair, "and I have some matters to discuss with him, would you mind leaving us alone for a while?"

"But I want to see you again," said the Squire. "Haven't met your equal, Carter, since I came to New York. You shall have an introduction to my daughter, and an invitation to Mrs. Merrion's music party? We'll get in some quiet room and play whist and drink punch till morning. What do you say?"

"Your heart's in the right place, me b'y," said Peter, "and your throat too, an' both guide your head. Same way with Peter. I accept; I'll go if a thousand stood in the way and I'll help ye mend matters, an' give ye the benefit o' my experience in the town; an' if ye want a hand in the little matter——"

"Good-morning," said Florian abruptly, almost pushing Peter outside the door, where he stood for some time indignant, and thought of going back to fling defiance in Florian's face; but as that might peril his chances of improving the Squire's acquaintance, he refrained and withdrew.

"A first-class character," said the Squire, "a real surprise. Where did you pick him up? A sort of Irish exile, hey?"

"Yes; but a rather spongy sort," said Florian, who was not at all as patient with Peter as the poet was.

"Spongy—that is, receptive. Ah! I understand. I'm glad to hear it. But now you're to come over to lunch, Mrs. Merrion said, and you must be introduced to get a bid to the *musicale*, you know. Ruth's just dying to see you, and so is Barbbery, because she's surprised to know there's a famous man in New York that doesn't bow down to her and attend her parties. Skittish creature—you recall her when she married Merrion, before she got into long dresses—but almighty nice if she wants to be. And now, Flory, I just ache to see you use your points well. Ruth's tired of things in general and, if you try rightly you are going to win this time, *if you want to*. Why I swear I never thought of asking you that, but then of course you do."

"It's not well to think of it," said Florian, who did not wish to give the garrulous Squire even a hint of his own feelings.

"No, I s'pose not," said the Squire dubiously and grief-stricken; "but then I might have known you'd be changed and more particular, now that you're famous."

"It isn't that," said Florian—"oh! no, not that. I think very much of Ruth, but then I would not trouble her over again with a suit that would not be to her liking."

"If that's all we'll arrange it to her liking, my boy."

But for all his cheerfulness the Squire felt more doubtful about his pet project than he had at any time since its conception. They went at once to Brooklyn, and arrived in time for lunch, and the meeting, which in Florian's mind was to have been a masterpiece of subdued emotion and passion, turned out as ordinary as could be desired.

"How do you do, Ruth?" said the handsome politician, with some relief in seeing how little changed Ruth was.

"I am very well, Florian, but I find it hard to recognize you," was the frank reply. She pressed his cold hands with her warm ones and gazed so calmly into his twitching face. "It is Florian," she said again, "but oh! how changed. Barbarba, let me introduce you to my friend Mr. Wallace. Florian, Mrs. Merrion."

He hardly saw the beautiful fairy that bowed to him, but the fairy saw him with all her eyes and pronounced him a perfect man; saw, too, what simple Ruth did not, that he was agitated at this meeting, and judged, from the Squire's beaming delight and Ruth's ordinary manner, that the old romance was long ago ended, much against the wishes of these two men. When he was going he received his invitation to the *musicale*.

"And there is a poet-dramatist in the same house with you," said Barbara, "that you must invite also. We leave out no celebrities."

"And there's Mr. Carter in the same place," said the Squire—"a noted journalist. I must have an invitation for him."



"By all means," said Barbara. "Madame Lynch has a faculty of getting around her the most unique people. I wish I had it."

Florian went away sad and disappointed, and with a feeling that, in spite of fame, influence, and wealth, Ruth was farther from him than ever.

Paul Rossiter went to the music party much against his will, for he was hard at work on a play, and there were matters of another kind demanding his attention which he would not lay aside for an audience with kings. Florian had brought him to see Mrs. Merrion, and the little lady had pressed him so hard, and had made such extravagant promises with regard to the new beauty whom she was to introduce to society, that he consented at last. When Ruth was introduced to him he saw for the first time the face of his dreams in its living image, although its owner had laid aside the simple yachting dress for the voluminous evening costume of the period; and being unprepared, he had started, blushed, stammered, and not come to himself rightly until he was sitting somewhere and the voice of the lady was talking about Florian.

"And you are a friend of Florian? I am so very glad to know it, for I have never really heard who his friends were. Do you not think him a very nice gentleman? And they tell me he has considerable political influence for so young a man."

"Oh! he's the best fellow in the world," said Paul, wondering all the time if he were really talking with the original of the picture, "and his influence is simply boundless in the city. He has been in the legislature, he will go to Congress, then the governor-

ship, and the presidency. There is nothing beyond that."

"So he finally comes to nothing," Ruth said smiling. "What an ending for so much greatness and influence! And is it really worth while struggling for all these things, when they come to so little at last?"

"Little and great are all alike," said Paul. "The nothingness we come to, I suppose, makes the worthless earthly honor all the more valuable."

"Florian's exact words," said Ruth. "Ah! now I can see you are very good friends, for you have his ideas, and he has yours, no doubt."

"I have his, no doubt," said Paul, "but if he has mine they must be very useless, being mostly fancies about dreams. How easily you recognize his sayings, Miss Pendleton! You must have known him very well."

"We lived in the same town and went to the same school for years; and then we were friends. Oh! I know Florian as if he were my brother. His sister"—her voice faltered—"was a dear friend of mine; and if you know him you must like him."

"And I do, and I shall like him all the more if his friendship will place me higher in your favor."

He trembled at his boldness, but she received it as a matter of course.

"I—will indeed. Florian's friends must all be worth knowing, for they were ever the choicest."

They talked on very pleasantly for a half hour, and then others came to disturb the delightful tête-à-tête and make him and her miserable; for Ruth had formed a sudden and strong liking for this warm-

hearted and warm-featured child of genius, which fell little short of the admiration he felt for her beauty. Florian had vainly tried, when once freed from the conversational charms of Barbara, to secure for himself a confidential talk with Ruth. Fate, in the person of the guests of Mrs. Merrion was against him. When one or the other did not engage him they surrounded Ruth like a city's walls, for the fair girl was become a general favorite that evening and was much sought after. She was a little tired of continuous adulation, and kept wishing that Paul would make his appearance again, and wondering why Florian did not join those sitting about her. Finding an opportunity to slip unobserved into a recess of some kind, she threw herself on a sofa, relieved to be free for a moment from the glare and heat and noise. When her eyes became accustomed to the dim light of the place she perceived that Florian was sitting opposite her.

"Is it you, Florian?" said she. "Oh! how I have tried to see you and speak to you this evening."

"It is impossible on a first night," said he quietly. "There are so many present, and your face is new to most of them. It's not much like a *musical* in Clayburgh."

"I think ours were much more pleasant."

"Well, I should hardly feel obliged to enjoy them as I used," he said, with the worn air of a man who had exhausted the pleasure contained in such entertainments. "It is so long since I have been there that I have quite forgotten them."

"I can believe you," she said, with the gentlest reproach in her voice. "You seem to have forgotten

everything connected with the poor little town and its glorious river."

"Not everything, Ruth. I remember Linda's grave, and how the river looks when only the stars are shining at midnight and the poor child lying there alone."

There was a sob in his voice, and the mention of Linda stirred Ruth deeply. She had felt like an artificial woman moving in her strange plumes through the brilliant company, and had wearied of the unvarying round of formal compliments and praise; but at this touch of feeling she became a Clayburgh girl again, and it was Ruth talking with Florian as in the old time.

"I would never suspect you of forgetting that, Florian, nor the hermit, who sent so many kind regards to you."

"You saw him often, then?"

"Not very often, but I presumed a little, perhaps, and he is so obliging, if a little cold, and he spoke of you rarely, but it was always something wise or good. Did you ever notice how pure his thoughts are—like water from a spring?"

"I may have noticed it, but it did not impress me, although I made it a point to study him. He has faded from my mind considerably, and I would find it hard to reproduce his features; but I know what he must have said to you about me when you were leaving."

"Do you?" she said in some alarm. "How can you know that when I have not told you, Florian?"

"See if I am right. 'You will find him changed

for the worse, my dear, and he will surely make love to you again,' said Scott."

"You are a magician," she answered, very much embarrassed. But then, imagining that Florian's boldness must arise from his indifference to their past state of feeling she felt relieved and happy, and laughed with him.

"I think he must have said something like it," she said, "but I cannot recall the words used. I wonder how much of it is true? I know you have not been guilty of the last charge, and will not be; but you are much changed in heart, Florian."

"What can you expect from the atmosphere in which I move?"

"I should expect that if it were very bad you would go away from it," she replied severely; "you often told me to do that, and common piety teaches it, too."

"Would you accuse a politician of piety?" he demanded, laughing.

Ruth was silent. There was something hard and forced in his manner.

"You cannot be pious in politics," he went on, understanding very well her feelings, "but one can keep from much evil. If you are wealthy or influential, or married to a good woman, you can keep from all."

"And as you are not wealthy——"

"And only moderately influential——"

"You ought to get married," said she; "and, indeed, rumor connects your name with some ladies very closely."

"No doubt, no doubt," he answered vaguely, and

felt a dumb pain stealing over him at the perfect indifference, or rather the friendly and sisterly interest she took in the matter.

"Linda would be so pleased to know you were happily suited in every way," she went on, "and I am sure I would."

"No doubt, no doubt," said he, shaking off the stupor that had seized upon him. "But we can talk of this again. You are not altogether out of my life, Ruth, and you may have as much to say as Linda herself in the matter before it is completed, perhaps more."

## CHAPTER XXI.

### OLD HOPES.

Mrs. MERRION's pleasant home became the center of attraction that winter for most of our friends in Madame Lynch's establishment. Florian admitted to himself that absence had only intensified his feelings towards Ruth. The years that had passed since their love story ended had honored her with new personal attractions. Her seriousness seemed less old-fashioned and more suited to her years than formerly. Her well-cultured mind made her a charming companion. She had a kind of boldness, too, which came in agreeably on certain occasions. When Barbara insisted on dressing her as nobly and richly as her appearance and years would sustain she entered into the spirit of the innovation, and became all at once a beautiful woman in the best sense of the phrase, beautiful in mind and body. Florian was astonished at her glorious bloom. It was natural that the love still slumbering in his heart should awaken to an intenser life than ever. He did not wait to discuss the situation with his usual caution. He surrendered at once to so much loveliness, partly conscious that this flame would in the end consume him.

Innocent Ruth, deceived by the calmness of his manner—there was always a certain hopelessness in

it, even when his chances seemed brightest—took no pains to prevent annoying consequences. She had a sincere friendliness for Florian, and some admiration for his character. He had improved since his departure from Clayburgh. His was a distinguished appearance, and there was about him such a consciousness of strength and power that most women succumbed to it. Barbara Merriion was immensely taken with him. It was owing to her interference that Florian found himself so often in Ruth's company.

Lunches, receptions, and theater parties brought together every week the boon companions, Peter and the Squire, who made no secret of their hopes and plans to marry Ruth and Florian. The poet, as often as he said to himself there was no hope for him in such a quarter, yet could never give up the chance to talk with Ruth and linger in her presence. Mrs. Merriion received none of his confidences, but aided him unsuspected of Florian and the other plotters. Thus the winter went on. Pendleton and Carter planned, debated, and feasted day and night, counting results long before there was any hope of achieving them. Florian and Paul dreamed pleasantly, and Ruth was dimly aware of a change in her own interior whose form she could not make clear to her perceptions. Barbara, the gracious marplot of the play, received new confidences daily and went about with the pleasant feelings of a cat who has a nest of young mice under her delicate paw. Only Paul Rossiter puzzled her still, and kept her from mischief. However, Florian soon cleared the field for her, and left her free to do what mischief she



pleased. He met Paul one day in the neighborhood of the post office, and the poet asked him why he looked so pale and jaded.

"You look worse than I ever saw you before," he said.

"Work and pleasure," Florian answered moodily, "are too much for me. These soirees have upset me, and I must give them up."

"When Miss Pendleton leaves," said Paul cautiously.

"Ah! you know that," said Florian quickly, for in all the winter they had rarely spoken about Ruth.

"Who could help knowing it, my dear boy? A retired sort of a young man begins suddenly to frequent society, and is always seen at those places where a certain young lady is sure to be. Is not the inference easy?"

"Yes, yes; and I never thought of that. Others, perhaps, will talk about it. But then she has not favored me more especially than other young men."

"Myself, for instance. I should say not! You are modest, of course; a successful man is always. I wish you happiness, Florian, for I think you are going to marry an excellent woman."

"I am not so near to that consummation," said the lawyer, "so your compliments are ill-timed. Did I ever tell you that—well what need to tell it now? I suppose you are aware that Miss Pendleton is a Protestant?"

"No," said Paul, in the highest astonishment. "I was not. On the contrary, when I saw the attention you paid to her, and how intimate you

appeared to be, I thought naturally she was a Catholic."

"Well, that was a queer blunder? And have you been talking of the Mass and confession, and other such topics to a Methodist of the deepest dye?"

"No," said Paul; "society is such a hybrid thing that you can talk only nonsense to avoid offending some one. But then isn't this a returning on principle, Florian? Have I not heard you say many times that you would never marry outside the faith, and hinted that you had already made sacrifices that were very great for a mere boy?"

"Love," said Florian, concealing his confusion under a gay exterior, "is universal and levels all distinctions."

"Or rather, it is irresistible," said Paul, with a laugh. "It can level the lawyer and the common man, not the distinctions. The distinctions remain, the men do not. But really this is a surprise to me."

Florian could hardly congratulate himself on having a possible rival removed from the field, so very dark seemed his own chances, and he became unpleasantly conscious of one circumstance before Paul left his company. The poet was disappointed in him. Some high standard as to his friend's character Paul had long ago formed in his own mind, and until this moment Florian had acted up to it in word and deed. Now the standard had fallen. He perceived it in his friend's expression, and felt humbled, all the more that the departure of this rival, if he were a rival, did not mean his own success. They parted in gloom. Paul went home in deep meditation, and its chief point was the sweet face that had

so long haunted him and was now to disappear like a laid ghost. From that day he no longer sought out Ruth, was careful and reserved in her presence, and talked only on the prosiest of subjects. Whenever they came to talk of religion, she commended many points of Catholic doctrine.

"Once," she ventured to say, "I had nearly made up my mind to become a Catholic. But in some way or another the design weakened, and finally it became repugnant even to think of it."

"You surprise me," said Paul. "It seems to me, Miss Pendleton, that once you brought your intelligence to bear on a thing, something certain and good ought to result from it."

"Thank you," she answered. "Now that I have begun I may as well finish the story. Perhaps I was to blame. I did not belong by conviction to any sect. My dear mother was a Methodist. When I went to church it was to the Methodists I went. To tell the truth I cared little for them. I fell into a kind of enthusiasm over your church and read, thought, and prayed a little, and when my enthusiasm cooled I dropped the matter."

"May I ask," said Paul, "what you believe in now?"

"In everything good," smiling as he shook his head. "You think that too vague? Well, I lost heart, not for religion, but for any particular shape of it——"

"Except your own," he interrupted.

"True. And I go to any church that suits the taste of the moment, now, and I am quite content, if my reason is not quite satisfied."

"You made a mistake somewhere."

"Do you think so? Where?" She was pleased at his finding fault with her so candidly and earnestly.

"Why," said Paul dubiously, "that enthusiasm which made you uneasy with yourself and set you hunting for more light, was a special grace from God. If you had used it rightly, you would now be a Catholic, or at least a hearty believer in something. Whereas, you are not much of anything."

"That is severe, Mr. Rossiter. I could not take warmly to Methodism, nor to any sect. They seemed too cold, or too silly, or too unreasonable. *Your* faith seemed too warm, and too—too—foreign, I suppose that's the word."

He laughed and changed the subject, but his words were not forgotten. They gave Ruth a sudden and clear insight into her former state of mind, and she saw at once the blunder she had committed in resisting the guidance of the Holy Spirit. After her failure to appreciate the claims of one religious belief she had drifted gently away from all, and had acquired a certain distrust of creeds. She had not become a better woman. Her charities were large enough, but the perfecting of her own nature was almost lost sight of, and she was in one respect only a small improvement on a virtuous pagan. Her first impulse was to repair the mischief of omission. But how? She asked Paul the question a week later.

"I don't know," said he, "you must find a way yourself. Test your belief by practising it, and when you get some clear ideas of religious duty, the rest will be easy, no doubt."

What could be more prudent and sensible than

such a course. She followed it carefully the entire winter, to the intense delight of Barbara, who, not seeing the reason for it, used it as an argument for the Squire and Mr. Carter. When they grumbled at Paul's steady attention to Ruth, she pointed out to them the devotion which Ruth displayed in attending the Methodist church and working for city charities.

"But Flory won't like it," said the Squire. "He can't marry a howling Methodist——"

"My dear Mr. Pendleton," said Barbara, "he will marry Ruth if she worshipped idols."

"Aye," said Peter, "if she were the grand Lama itself."

"Think so?" murmured the Squire, and he tried to believe it on the ground that the boy had got more sense and judgment from his stay in New York. He did not like Ruth's sudden turn to religion.

"There's something wrong," he said to Florian. "She always hated the Methodists. What is she so gone on them for now, I'd like to know. You remember, Flory, the last time she kicked on you? It was just after one of these religious spells. And if she doesn't wind up by doing the same thing now, then I'm not the man who got left with Mackenzie on the north side of the St. Lawrence."

Florian quieted him for the time with the assurance that Ruth would not remain long with her present associations. He was quite right. Ruth soon tired of her attempts to fall in love with Methodism, but did not lose the desire to find a resting place, and she was bound not to return to the old ways of indifference. Again she asked Paul's advice, one

bright evening as Barbara and she were returning from devotions at the Cathedral. He gave it briefly.

"Try something else, Miss Pendleton."

"There is nothing left but your faith," said she, "and, while I do not care to approach it again, I have made up my mind to follow your advice, and study it once more."

"In the right spirit," he suggested.

"In the right spirit. I do not hope to find comfort there, but constant trying will bring me to a conclusion of some kind."

"Very true," he said, taking her hand. "I hope you will make this resolution, Miss Pendleton, and follow wherever it will lead you. If you do, I am certain you will find rest and happiness. If you do not you will be a most unhappy woman. Good-night."

She replied in a low, trembling voice. He had been standing hat in hand, with the moonlight falling upon his remarkable face, and shining in his honest eyes. In that moment Ruth loved the poet. She was not conscious of it, only of his goodness, but in after years she knew that her heart went out to him in that moment, and was never withdrawn.

Lightly as Paul received the information of Ruth's religious belief from Florian, it had hurt him deeply. It was not the poet's way to make much of a hopeless matter, particularly when it bordered on affairs of conscience, and in the present instance he had hastened to remove many old impressions with regard to Ruth, and was very careful to chase from his dreams the sweet fancies concerning her which had beguiled and lightened some heavy hours. He had seen at once what sort of a woman Ruth was—

no trifle to pay hide-and-seek with the serious things of life, but a woman full of earnestness—and he could therefore the more easily understand why Florian had not succeeded in making her his wife. Marrying, with her, was a matter of principle, not of feeling or of convenience or advantage alone. She had deep convictions of the truth and falsity of religions, and of the necessity of one true faith, and her natural mental cleanness forbade her imperiling these for the sake of her likings. It was a firm soul indeed which could resist the heavy temptations to which she had been subjected, and he admired her the more for it, and prayed sincerely that her goodness might win for her an entrance into the holy harbor this side of heaven. She had seemed to be in a state of doubt, and he had said some sharp, earnest words to her, partly because his deepest interest in her was dead and he was not afraid of offending, but more because he had taken her statements without due attention to the exaggeration of fancy. He did not believe she was as uncertain about Methodism as she thought. She had read and thought enough, no doubt, to get misty and unsettled in her religious views. But one does not leave old beliefs hastily, particularly so reverent and firm a believer as Ruth, and the very contemplation of a change would be apt to make her cling more tightly to old certainties. Women, too, as a rule, are distrustful to-day of the strength and truth of emotions which moved them yesterday. Of this Ruth herself was an example, and she was probably now laughing over her own sentiment and his severity during their walk from the cathedral.

But in this he was wrong, and at his next visit she said: "I was very much disturbed that evening coming from church, and was half resolved to go away from New York at once."

"But you have thought better of it, I see. The music and the solemn service on a moonlight night give one enthusiastic notions. I am inclined always after them to go away and be a hermit; but a sound sleep, or, better, an oyster supper on the way home, brings me back to my senses."

"Oh! but it was not the music, Mr. Rossiter. I had thought of many things a long time, until I knew not what to do, and I came to New York partly in the hope of forgetting my mental troubles. I was succeeding—yes, I think I was succeeding—when your words spoiled all. Were you enthusiastic that evening, Mr. Rossiter, were you too earnest?"

"I have thought so since," he said hesitatingly, "but what I said was in itself true. When persons are in a state of doubt they are bound to get out of it."

"But doubt is sometimes a temptation."

"It can be banished by prayer, then, or by removing the exciting causes. But as I understood you, your doubt had only increased with time and thinking. There was something more in it than mere temptation. I know that even in that case an honorable doubt can be smothered, for there are many to whom such a grace was given and of their own will they destroyed it. I would not be in their shoes for worlds."

"But now," added he playfully, and sorry to be so quickly drawn into this subject, "I shall frighten you again by my earnestness."



"No, no; I am utterly helpless, Mr. Rossiter, and confused too. Let me tell you just the kind of doubts which trouble me. Your church has received so many Protestants that you must know something of their general state of mind, and perhaps you can help me. Pray do not refuse me," when he had begun to decline the honor. "I know what you would say, and it only urges me the more to speak to you. Remember you are partly responsible for my late annoyances, and, like an honest gentleman, you must help me out of my difficulties."

She did not give him time to raise any great objections, but poured out her story. It was plainly and sensibly done, and he had no fault to find with her.

"I think," said he, "that you are in a peculiar state. I don't believe any advocate of Methodism could ever convince you of its truth again."

"Then you would advise me——"

"I would rather not take such a responsibility," he interrupted. "It is easy for you to draw inferences from what I have said. I can fancy your father and friends would not be very grateful to me for any advice."

"They are of very little account to me," she began, and then stopped. "What does it matter?" she continued. "And, indeed, I am hasty and unkind in dragging you into difficulty. I must beg your pardon and thank you for your kindness."

"I fear you will think me timid," he said, "but in this country we are suspicious of converts. Religious thought is not very deep, and religious feeling not very steady. Women, too, are emotional creatures,

especially in religion. Some very bad blunders have already been committed. I do not wish to add to them. Let God's grace work its way, and whatever I can do to aid it I shall do, but prudently."

"You speak wisely," she replied, and then the conversation ended with Barbara's entrance.

It was the last time they were to meet in years, for Ruth took the resolution that evening to retire for a time into a convent, and in the excitement of departure found no opportunity to call the poet to her side again. And Barbara Merriion was so eager to get rid of her, that she too forgot the propriety of affording him the consolation of a farewell meeting.

## CHAPTER XII.

### REJECTED.

IN his luxurious rooms Florian was sitting, arrayed in his dressing-gown, his hands clasped idly on his lap, his gaze wandering and frightened ; while before him stood the red, vexed, irritated Squire who had brought in the news of Ruth's intended departure.

"What's to be done, Flory—what's to be done?"

Florian knew there was but one thing to be done, and the utter hopelessness of success made him despondent. This was not as he would have had the scenery and properties when he came to declare his love. Pendleton had told him nothing more than that Ruth, disturbed by her old religious doubts, was going away to a convent. There was nothing to account for the train of thought and feeling which had led up to so surprising an event ; if the Squire knew anything he declined to talk about it.

"I had thought," said Florian helplessly, "of renewing an old proposal."

"Had you, my boy—had you?" cried Pendleton. "Then it's the only thing that will stop this flight—the only living, almighty thing."

"But it's useless to try it under such circumstances," Florian continued. "She is upset in mind ; she has not shown any particular care for me since——"

"What, Flory!" said the Squire, "what are you talking of, lad? Not shown any particular care for you! Why, man, it has been nothing but Florian here and Florian there to her friends, to her acquaintances, and to strangers since she came to New York. 'Do you know Florian Wallace?' was her first question, until Mrs. Merrion had to tell her it looked as if you were engaged still."

Florian's shrewder sense told him that the Squire's likings had taken the place of his powers of observation, but it was very sweet to know that some people thought Ruth willing to renew the old relationship. And she was going away? It might be the last chance of testing her feelings, and if the result were unfavorable no harm would be done. They would be sure to understand each other better.

A great slice of the romance of Florian's character had been devoured by the capacious jaws of his political ambition. Sensibility and delicacy were less fine, evidently, or he would have seen how very much injury this surrender of old principle would do him, and how hurtful it was to his own sense of honor and religion. He looked at the position, not as a lover torn with doubts as to the result of his action, but as a man of the world taking his chances, shrugging his shoulders at failure, mildly muttering bravo at success. It was not a thing to be mourned over long, though.

"If you wouldn't insist on—on the old condition," the Squire began.

"Nonsense!" said Florian. "I have got over that. I'll take her no matter how she comes."

"O Lord!" cried the delighted father, "then it

is settled. She'll not go to the convent. Now, my lad, just brush up and get over to Barbary's for lunch, for she's packing up and may be off at any moment."

Florian felt as he dressed that his position was similar to that of one arraying himself for decapitation. But he proceeded calmly and heroically to his doom, and at two o'clock that afternoon was lunching with Barbara and Ruth in the pretty dining-room in Brooklyn. Ruth was pale and worn, but determined. Florian knew that look of old and what it meant, better than her father. He received notice of her departure with an air of well-bred surprise. "There is one consolation in it," Barbara said—"it's the end of the season. But then there was so much for Ruth to see which does not belong to fashionable life, and so many people will be disappointed."

"The disappointment of the many troubles Ruth very little," said he, with pointed reference to her indifferent expression.

"I never thought of them," Ruth answered wearily, "and I'm sure they never once thought of me; nor do I care."

"You never did," said Florian, and both ladies felt an iciness in the tone that gave a double meaning to the words. When the lunch was ended Barbara left them together.

"This sudden flight," said Florian, "looks remarkable, but I know you never do anything hastily. Is it a homeward flight?"

"No," said Ruth frankly, "it goes heavenward—at least I hope so."

"You are always flying in that direction," he said with quiet sarcasm.

"Not always, but I am to make a good effort this time." And her lips were compressed for an instant. "I am disgusted with my own doubts and I am going to rid myself of them forever. I am in a search for certainty."

"I offered it to you once," he said indifferently.

"And I am sure I did well in refusing it *then*, Florian."

Why did she put such a stress on that last word? It made his heart bound like a frightened deer, but he was silent until she added: "And don't you think so too?"

"Why should I? If it was for your benefit, I say yes; but if it has condemned me to a course of suffering that ambition alone could smother——"

Her amused laugh interrupted him.

"Then you smothered it with ambition?"

"With the aid of hopelessness," he answered bitterly. "Did I not know you well and myself too?"

"I must say you did, and I am sorry to think I did not know you better. Through all this winter I was afraid you would propose again."

"The winter is not over yet, Ruth."

"But I am gone from the world. Florian, I shall never come to New York again. I like home best, and if I come into the world once more it will be to live and die outside of this turmoil and uproar. You cannot applaud that decision?"

"No, for I had hoped to induce you to remain in it as long as I would." His face, in spite of his self-

control, grew for one moment ashen pale, and the tone which accompanied these words brought Ruth to her feet flushing with pain.

"O Florian," she cried, "you surely don't mean to——"

"Why not?" he answered severely. "You may have cast aside my love easily enough, but I find it harder to forget. Ruth, I have not ceased to love you since I left Clayburgh, nor have I ceased to hope. You are looking for certainty and rest. You will find them here." And he held out his arms invitingly.

"If you were not so very sincere," she said, and stopped. There was a restrained and awkward silence for a long time, until both came slowly to their cooler selves.

"You have honored me, Florian," she said gently; "but it is an honor I cannot accept. I am still a Protestant——"

"Pray let that pass," he said hastily. "I do not insist on your becoming a Catholic. My love has risen above such distinctions."

The hand which she placed on his shoulder fell from it suddenly and, looking up, he saw an expression of surprise and grief on her face and quickly interpreted it.

"I had always thought *that* a principle with you," she said slowly.

"Principles suffer from the wear of time," he answered, "as well as ourselves, though we are immortal."

"O Florian!" She spoke the words in deepest sorrow. "I hope there are very few things to which

you cling as poorly. That is one of my principles yet. You accused me a moment ago of forgetting, but *that* I have not forgotten."

"It is because I love you," he replied sadly; "and I fear I could forget much more because of you."

"I am not worthy of it, Florian."

"O Ruth!" Her two hands were on her lap and he seized them passionately. "Is there no hope? Can we never resurrect that sweet past that lies buried with Linda by the river?"

"Never,"—she said the words with an effort—"no more than we can resurrect Linda."

He dropped her hands with a long look of grief and pain; he realized fully that he was losing her forever, and her last words put his sentence in its best form so that he could not misunderstand it.

"But you must know why I am going," she said after a pause; "for you are my best friend, and, although you have hurt me by this scene, I cannot but feel that you have honored me beyond deserving. Do you know that, while I could not join the Catholic Church or leave my own, I always had a doubt as to the truth of Methodism, but it took long to convince me that my position of doubt was sinful. I have found out at last that to remain willingly in that state is sin, and by the grace of God I am going to rid myself of it forever."

"If you had had that feeling in the old days," said Florian, "what a happy story ours would have been."

"Why did you not give me the feeling?" she said sharply. "Why did you leave it for Mr. Rossiter to do?"



"It was an oversight," he said in surprise. "But I was not aware that Paul talked religion to you. He is stricter even than I am in such matters."

"I told him of my former nearness to the Church, and he lectured me one night for not making proper use of the graces I had then received, and filled me with dread of my present position. It has rankled in my heart since. It has led to my present determination. Ah! he has the poet's soul."

"It was a moonlight night?" questioned Florian.

"I think so. Yes, I remember now it was. His eyes shone so when he bade me good-night, and he stood looking upward."

"I thought it," he said quietly, and she did not notice the sarcasm, for her memory was dwelling on the splendor of the poet's eyes. "And so you are going away to hunt up the blessed certainty of the faith! Is it not a queer place to settle one's doubt in a hot-bed of Catholicity? For instance, if I went to the Whigs to learn the strength of some doubts I had concerning Democracy."

"I am certain of this," said she: "that Methodism is not Christianity, and I am going to investigate Catholicity where it shines brightest, and take that as the standard."

"Well, that is wise. When you return to Clayburgh I shall be sure to meet you, for I am going up there some day. I shall wait until you shall return, or mayhap longer if politics offer me inducements."

"You say that because you think I would say it," she replied. "You will never go to Clayburgh to see anybody, Florian; you will never see it again, unless on business or when brought there to die. If

you can prophesy of me, why not I of you? Good-bye. Why did you not bring your poet with you?"

"He knows nothing of your departure. You would have gone without a word to him, to whom you should be very grateful."

"I shall be," she said very tenderly, "always."

And so they parted. Barbara met him in the hall on his way out, and was surprised and pleased to see no evidence of strong emotion about him. She had looked for a romantic love storm.

"Now that we are losing Ruth," said she, "I trust we shall not also lose the pleasure of seeing you frequently."

"That would be a distinction I never could have deserved," said Ruth. "Florian can never forget your kind hospitality."

"True," said Florian; "if I could I would be sadly wanting in gratitude."

"Is it so amicably settled?" whispered Barbara to him at the door; and when he nodded, she said, "I am so very glad. We shall not lose you entirely." And Florian departed, puzzled, disappointed, yet pleased by the tender tone of her voice.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE INQUISITORS.

WITH the flight of Ruth the second act in the comedy ended, and the curtain was rung down on Madame Lynch's boarding-house. Very much like a deserted play-house it looked in the days that followed. Florian was deep in the preparation for a congressional campaign with his name at the head of the ticket, so that he was rarely seen in the handsome rooms where hung the yachting picture. Frances, buoyed up by a hope which love only could hold out to her, was touched at times with the green melancholy, but smiled oftener and was happy at a word or a look from her ideal of manhood. Paul worked away in the attic at plays, essays, and poems, and was troubled because of a sudden coldness which had sprung up between him and Florian. Peter and the Squire alone seemed to retain that boisterous spirit of frolic which had enlivened the winter, but for want of encouragement displayed very little of it. Every spirit was dulled, and life seemed to have met with so unpleasant a lull that a storm was necessary to rouse the people who floated in it like motes in a sunbeam.

The summer passed and lengthened into fall. Florian's run for Congress set the house in a ferment. It was a great thing to have one of the boarders

graduating from the front parlor to Congress, and when the election had passed and he was returned by a handsome majority the reception tendered him by Madame Lynch was superb. All the world was there, and in some way it began to be understood that Frances was the lucky woman who would draw the lion of the day in the matrimonial lottery. It was on the evening of this reception that two gentlemen called upon Florian while he was engaged among the guests. It was after eleven, and, unless the matter was urgent, the great man could not be seen till after midnight.

"We can go to the hotel," said one gentleman to the other, "and rest until that time. You will please tell Mr. Wallace that a gentleman on important business will call upon him after the reception. As he is compelled to leave the city early in the morning, he must see him during the course of the night."

They went away without further trouble, and the servant naturally forgot to mention their visit or message. Coming to his room a little after one, jaded and depressed, deep as was the draught of popularity which he had quaffed, Florian threw himself on a chair and gave himself up to aimless thought. A pier-glass stood directly in front of him, and he had a full and fair view of the new Congressman—the petted idol of society, the present form of the serious yet light-hearted boy who fished, swam, and loved not many years back on the St. Lawrence. It was a delightful but not a satisfactory feeling which his new honors gave him. There was no fullness about the heart, no complete lull of that bitter craving of ambition which had vexed him so long. He

could hardly realize that this elegant gentleman with brown, parted beard, and pale serious face was really he who had loved Ruth Pendleton.

The mirror which reflected his form seemed to center all its light on him. The background was very dark, and yet while he was looking a shadowy face seemed to grow out of the darkness and come nearer to him. He watched and studied it as a curious phantom of the brain, until a cough reached his ears and notified him that a person had really entered the room. The first look at the stranger led Florian to believe that he was dreaming, for the man who stood gravely there, as if waiting to be welcomed, was the living image of Scott, the hermit of the Thousand Islands, when last he had seen him at Linda's grave: cap worn in helmet-fashion, blue shirt and high boots, and the red beard with the sharp blue eyes shining above. He made no movement and uttered no word, but stood looking at Florian until a chill crept down the Congressman's shoulders.

"Scott, is this you?" he said, holding out his hand. "You look like an apparition."

"And so I am," said Scott, taking the proffered hand for a moment—"a ghost of the past. Could I be more out of place than in this grand house?"

"You don't look so," said Florian, who felt that the hermit's simplicity would not be amiss in the homes of kings, and he held tightly to his hand and shook and pressed it as if he never would let go.

"This is the hand Linda held," he said in excuse for his rudeness. "You have overthrown me quite.

I am glad, but I can't feel as if anything new had happened, you came so suddenly."

The hermit went around examining the room in his simple way, stopped at the picture of Linda for a moment, for a longer time at the picture of Ruth.

"This should not be here," he said, "if I know what's what in this city."

"True," said Florian: "but it's hard to do right always."

"Not for you," said the hermit, and suspicious Florian felt a harshness in the tone. "Not for one who in the main acts squarely is it hard. Do you think so?"

"Some things are so much harder than others," was the reply, very slowly and smilingly given. "But this is a cold greeting, Scott. I feel the honor you have done me. It is something unusual for you to do, and I am troubled to show you how it impresses me."

"No anxiety on my account," said Scott, coming to take a seat in front of him, with his eyes still studying the beauty of the room. "I must be off before daylight. And so you're a Congressman?"

"High up, isn't it?" said Florian, blushing like a school boy. "I am pretty close to great things, too close to make much fuss if I should get them. And you remember what you said to me about political life—that it would be my damnation, perhaps. Ah! how many a greater man must live to eat his own prophecy."

"I have not eaten mine yet," said Scott, "and perhaps I hold a leetle mite stronger to that opinion. Being a Congressman at thirty-one isn't so great a

show. It's ordinary in these days, and it's not an evidence of piety either ; do you think so ? ”

“ Well, no,” and he laughed. “ But then I have not lost the faith. I am the same old Florian, fond of speculating, of fishing, of old friends, and of Scott the hermit, in particular. I am a boy yet, and I resemble St. Paul inasmuch as I have kept the faith. My course is yet to be finished.”

“ No doubt you will be able to say that too, some time,” said Scott, and Florian thought his seriousness was intended to mask his sarcasm.

“ No doubt, Scott. And you hint that I shall be able to say no more. Pshaw ! I went to confession and Communion last—last spring, and I never miss Mass. I have no taint of liberalism. I object to papal infallibility, and that is not yet defined.

“ And do you object to mixed marriages ? ”

A burning flush spread over Florian's face.

“ Well, I am firm as to the theory if not as to the practice. But I was not aware that many knew of this, indeed.”

“ Squire Pen'l'ton knew it.”

“ Which means that the whole world is in the secret.”

“ It was a big fall from Clayburgh notions,” Scott said, with his sharp eyes piercing his very soul.

“ I was only a boy then and had no experience.”

“ If you were mine I would be prouder of the boy's actions than of the man's. It was a fair and square move to keep clear of Protestant wives for the sake of the little ones. I don't think you improved on it.”

“ Perhaps not ; but the world, I find, thinks little

of these things. I shall always regret my Clayburgh obstinacy on that point." He looked up sadly to the picture hanging over the bookcase, and his firm lips trembled. He had lost it forever, and no one to blame but himself.

"I shall always regret it, Scott—always."

"I've no doubt," the hermit said shortly; "an' you'll lose more time than that before you wind up."

"See, friend," said Florian, turning with playful sharpness upon him, "I have an idea you came here simply to haul me over the coals. If so, proceed to the coals. I'm more honored than before, for a man must think much of another to travel so far for his sake alone."

The hermit drew a bit of newspaper from his pocket, and, after smoothing out its wrinkles and creases, handed it to him. "Père Rougevin gave me that," he said; "it is an extract from one of your stump speeches. I think he doubted it, but I'd like to hear your opinion on the thing. It's something new."

Florian read as follows: "Education belongs properly to the state, and any attempt to rival its systems cannot fail to be hurtful to all. After some experience in the matter I am convinced that our public school system is as fair an attempt at governmental education as can be attained at present. All other systems should be frowned upon. Religion must attend to its churches and its catechism, and let general education alone."

"It is mine," said Florian frigidly and briefly.

Without a word the hermit dropped it into the wastebasket, and, arising, he began aimlessly to read



the titles of the works in the library. Decidedly Florian was not feeling as pleasant over this visit as he expected, and the hermit's allusion to mixed marriages and the producing of the extract cut him deeply. What was the next crime? he wondered.

"Them titles and names," said Scott, "don't sound well. Voltaire, Strauss, Heine, Goethe, Hobbes, Hume. If I'm not wrong, them's the people have done as much harm to the world as men could do."

Florian laughed at his pronunciation of the names for Goethe was called Goathe, and Voltaire Voltary.

"I bought them out of curiosity," Florian explained. "People talked of them and their authors until I felt ashamed of knowing nothing more about them than what I had read. They did not impress me much, I can tell you."

"No, I s'pose not. They usually don't, such books." He was turning over periodical literature, and, recognizing among them some of the worst sheets of the day, pointed to them as one would to a rotten carcass, saying, "I've heard the Père give his opinion of them things."

"And it was not a favorable one, I feel sure. Well, a politician must see and read things in order to keep abreast of the times. They leave no impression on me, save regret for the folly and the crime which produced them."

"The whole place," said Scott, "has a literary atmosphere. I should think you'd want to keep it pure. You were brought up to pure air, pure thinking, pure doing. But this," with a comprehensive gesture around, "don't look anything like your bringing up."

Florian was gnawing his lip with vexation by this time, for the hermit ignored his arguments, his attacks and defense and apology entirely, and spoke as if in a soliloquy.

"Bringing up was a little roughly done in Clayburgh," said he carelessly, "and a little narrow-minded. If I had remained there I would have gone on ignorant of the world and its great though erring minds. It does not injure a man to know of his great brethren, even if they be fallen."

"Has it done you any good?" asked the hermit, fixing once more upon him the gentle eyes. "You say you read 'em because you wanted to talk about 'em with people who had them on their lips always. Well, you've done your talkin' and your end is reached. Whar's the good?"

"I have learnt something from their errors and from their story, like the sailor who passes the scene of a comrade's shipwreck. You will never find me advocating Rousseau's civil-government ideas or believing in—but I beg you pardon; I had forgotten that you were unacquainted with these things. Dry enough, aren't they, even when compared with dry politics! But here, my dear friend, this is not what you came for from Clayburgh. You have some news for me, have you not? How's the fishing in Eel Bay? And how do people comport themselves in the staid old town?"

"I don't know much about 'em, but I believe they're well. Your sister's eldest child died, you know"—he did not, but thought it best to say nothing—"and your father, as you heard, had a narrow escape with rheumatism of the heart."

He had not heard that either, and was ashamed to think that letters from home had been lying unopened and forgotten for weeks on his table.

"They was kind of expectin' you'd show up there soon. They don't know your vocation is so well settled, and they thought your likin's was stronger."

"Business with a young man," said Florian, "is usually too pressing to admit of much recreation."

"I s'pose." The tone of these two words was delightful, and, although they stung him, Florian was compelled to laugh.

"When you return, Scott, you can tell them how well I am looking and how neatly my new office fits me. Next year I shall try to deliver an oration at their Fourth of July turn out. And to this you can add your own opinions of me."

"I would not like to," said Scott, shaking his head; "it wouldn't please your friends to know you are as you are. You've changed, boy, for the worse. The man that reads such books and thinks as you think—he's on the wrong road. I hope for Linda's sake you won't reach its end. That little grave ought to be a reproach to you. I have a paper that you writ before you left, and I brought it down, thinkin' perhaps you might care to read it."

"Nonsense!" said Florian roughly; "let the buried past stay in its grave."

The hermit sighed secretly, and before either could speak again a knock came to the door, and Père Rougevin entered and shook hands with Florian warmly.

"Glad to see you in your new honors, Flory," with the gentle, upward wave of the hand that the

young man knew so well: "hope they will wear and stand a public washing. Scott here is quite sober-looking. You've been recalling old reminiscences. What a fine library! Standard works, too! Um, um! Voltaire—oh! Goethe—ah! Rousseau—there's the politician! Your reading is comprehensive, Flory, shining, like the sun, on the good and bad indifferently! There's the mind of your true modern statesman."

"See the difference between the two men," said Florian smiling, yet quite aware of the Père's biting sarcasm. "Here this vicious hermit has been reviling me for reading these things."

"Well, Scott has old-fashioned views," said the Père. "He hardly understands the vigor of the faith in our rising Catholic generation—how easily these assaults of Satan are beaten back by their vigorous arms, and how quickly these snows of infidelity melt from them, like water off a duck's back, as the old lady said. But no one can persuade him. He is morbid and melancholy. He would have us all hermits."

Scott rose and prepared to go.

"I am sorry for you," he said, with a look at Florian, more direct and earnest than he usually gave to any one. "Good-bye."

"Good-by," said Florian, but they did not shake hands. The Père was standing with his eyes on Ruth's picture.

"That should not be there," he said, as he offered his hand for the parting salute; "but the old love seems to die hard."

"Shall I see you in Washington this winter?"

said Florian, ignoring these remarks. "You are always talking of a visit there; surely you will make it now."

"It is likely, thank you, unless"—and he looked at him shyly—"you begin to make speeches on education."

He was gone the next instant, and the Congressman, weary and irritated, returned to his meditations in disgust. These two men were slowly fading out of his life, and it was hard to endure in silence their rustic sarcasms. Even if their charges were true, what use in making them? He would not go back to the rusticity of Clayburgh.

The mention of Linda's grave had stirred him and it brought back her dying words and the sweet love she had for him. "I wonder," he thought, curiously as he fell asleep—he would once have spurned the thought with indignation—"if I could ever forget that last scene and those last words. O Linda! I pray with all my heart that we may meet again."

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MYSTERY.

THE clouds had been gathering over the city of Washington during a warm December afternoon, and after sunset the rain began to fall, lightly at first in a troublesome drizzle, and later in a heavy downpour. The municipal almanac had announced a full moon, and although the threatening of the heavens was plain enough for six hours before darkness, the officials preferred to stand by the almanac and leave pedestrians and thieves to stumble and grow profane in the Egyptian darkness. A private dwelling on one street had the lamp lighted before its own doors, and under this lamp at the same moment two dripping gentlemen stopped for the purpose of lighting cigars. The Hon. Florian Wallace shivered slightly at the first impression of the stranger's face, it was so white, so dull, so cruel; the flickering light of the lamp, and the red glow of the match gave it a very sinister expression besides. The stranger looked at him slyly but strangely for a long time, as if studying a long forgotten scene and trying to place it in his memory.

In fact, Florian grew nervous while they stood in that central spot of light, and the inquisitive glances of the stranger pained him. With a hasty remark

about the weather, he plunged into the darkness. He had walked the streets on such nights many a time, had met with people more disgusting than the stranger, had faced dangerous characters even, and had never feared as he had to-night. It might have been the strain of the day's labor. He was ready to laugh at himself when he had reached his hotel. In its warmth and brightness he felt ashamed of his feelings. It was awkward that in the loneliness of his room the face should return to his mind like the memory of a portrait, shaping its thin lips, sharp eyes, yellow beard, and coldness against a darkness of wind and rain. The rush of business next day prevented him from dwelling on it often, and until he came to speak on some bill in the house he did not once recall it. He was in the middle of a speech, when he stopped, stammered through a sentence, hesitated, and then, with an effort, resumed his speech and finished. The cause of the interruption was a glimpse he had gotten of the stranger in the gallery surveying him with an opera glass.

However, he ceased to be troublesome within a day or two, and when Mrs. Merrion arrived in town and sent him notice of her first ball the stranger had almost faded from his memory. The ball was a brilliant affair. Uniforms of embassies were sprinkled plentifully through the throng, and Mrs. Merrion gazed upon them in ecstatic delight.

"If there is anything I do like," said she, with a giggle to Florian, "it is the army, navy, and embassy uniforms. They give *such* an air to a room! By the way," she added, "I wish you to make the

acquaintance of one of the nicest young men here to-night."

They proceeded to the music-room and heard a tenor voice rolling off some foreign syllables.

"That is he," said Barbara; "he is a Russian, a count, and holds first rank at the embassy. He is handsome, witty, good-humored, talented, and his voice speaks for itself."

When they entered the room the Russian count was leaving the piano.

"Count Vladimir Behrenski—the Honorable Florian Wallace."

The gentleman bowed low, offered his hand, and warmly pressed Florian's.

"Now you are already friends," said Barbara, leaving them, "and you shall be rivals in my good graces."

"They are so many," said the Count. "Mr. Wallace, I have been desiring to know you this long time, since it came to me that I saw in you a wonderful resemblance to a noble Russian family—a family of royal connections, in truth. The likeness is very clear and very exact."

"You surprise me," said Florian. "It would interest the noble family, I'm sure, to know an American citizen honored them by personal resemblance."

"Your resemblance is so very close and exact to the Prince Louis of Cracow," the Count said meditatively. "If there were Russians here acquainted with him they would take you for him, but that his hair is light."

"I may be an offshoot, Count. My mother came



from Ireland, and no doubt Russians emigrated thither some time. We are descended from princes, I know."

"Yes, the Irish are a princely race, more so than others Europeans—the island being small, I think, and the word prince having a wide application. You were born in this country, sir?"

"Oh, yes, and nursed and educated into Yankee notions."

"They are very elastic, these Yankee notions," said the Count. "Would you call the pretty hostess, Mrs. Merrion, a Yankee notion?"

"The term is hardly used that way," Florian answered. "But you seem to think Mrs. Merrion of an elastic disposition."

"She is a fine woman, delightful; but it is hard to understand her. We know two classes of women in Europe—the very good, and the very bad. It is easy to tell at once the class. Not so with your American ladies. Your code of manners is elastic. It is a Yankee notion."

"Purely," said Florian, uneasy at the drift of the Count's remarks. "It would hardly suit the Russian climate."

The Count shook his head and laughed at the idea.

"Yet it is very amusing at first. There is a fine uncertainty about it, and it sharpens the faculties wonderfully. They tell me you are one of the rising men, Mr. Wallace?"

"Gradually rising," laughed Florian. "I have the White House in view."

"Four years of power—just a mouthful. Bah! And you strive for years like giants to get the place.

I had rather be a count over a little village than such a man. If you were offered a princeship to-morrow and the presidency at the same moment, which to you would be the nearest to choose?"

"That which is perpetual," said Florian gravely, "of course. But we never have perpetual power in this country."

"I know. I referred to other countries. Suppose you were heir to some distant noble family of Ireland?"

"An earldom would satisfy me," said Florian.

He stopped, his face whitened, and his jaw fell. At the window near which they stood appeared the cold outlines of the haunting face, its cruelty outlining itself so sharply and suddenly on the pane as to overwhelm him with terror. He recovered himself speedily, but did not finish the sentence.

"What's the matter?" said the Count, with much sympathy.

"Oh! a weakness of mine," said Florian. "You will excuse me for a time, until I have recovered myself."

The Count bowed, and Florian went silently out into the garden and strode along the walk, hot from anger. It was plain the face was haunting him, and for a purpose. He could not explain it, but he was determined to put an end to it, a determination which came to nothing for he never saw the face of the stranger again. Clayburgh did, however, and had a quietly exciting time over it. One late train from New York made the railway station a pleasant place each evening for the public personages of the village. Squire Pendleton and Mr. Wallace, whom

his neighbors knew and respected as Billy, were prominent at these receptions. Visitors found the welcoming stare of the villagers rather trying, and often slipped away under cover of the darkness from the rear platform of the last car. On a certain night in April the only passenger on the train played this disgusting trick on the reception committee, which went home in a profane mood, leaving Billy Wallace to watch for him a half hour, and to report progress the next evening.

Billy began to parade the platform in deep meditation. The lamp with its strong reflection was shining at the door, and he passed and repassed the line of light, stopping at times to blink at the curious scientific phenomenon of a thing you could not look at steadily. Out on the water a few patches of twilight were still burning like expiring lamps, and a few forms walked and talked in the gathering darkness, while trainmen and officials rolled in the freight and hurled bad language at the bad boys. It was after a few turns up and down the platform that Billy became aware of a gentleman's presence a few feet distant, whose outline impressed him with a sense of strangeness. His face could not be seen, and he was idly leaning against the building. With customary boldness Billy walked up to him, bade him good evening, made remarks on the weather, asked if he was a stranger in town, how long he was going to stay, and could he be of any use to him; to some of which the stranger did not reply, and at the rest merely grunted—grunted so impolitely that only personal considerations prevented Billy from knocking him down. He resumed his walking,

noticed that the gentleman was observing him closely, turned abruptly, and went home. He was half-way up the street when it occurred to him that this might be the traveler who had eluded them by stepping off at the rear end of the train; as he had walked up the hill in the heat of indignation, so he rushed back again in the heat of curiosity, and came upon the stranger standing unconcernedly under a lamp-post, looking around him. He turned his gaze on Billy. It may have been the unexpectedness of meeting him that puzzled the old gentleman's faculties, for he stopped in confusion, gasped out "The devil!" faintly, and fled with the idea that the stranger was in pursuit.

Mrs. Winifred, sitting calmly in the back parlor sewing, and weaving in a tear with an occasional stitch as she thought of the gay voices that made the night pleasant years ago, heard the door open and shut violently, and saw Billy, as in a vision, appear and throw himself in a chair exhausted, with the sweat on his brow and his face wrinkleless from terror. Nothing alarming in his appearance ever provoked alarm in Mrs. Winifred, and she continued her sewing without comment or question.

Behind her, but some distance to her left, was a window looking out into the garden, and opposite to the window hung a mirror so placed that, without seeing herself in it, Mrs. Winifred could see the window, whose curtain was only half down. In one casual glance at the mirror she saw outlined against the darkness behind the window a white, peculiar face. She dropped her eyes immediately on her work, in fear that her senses were misleading her;

and when she was certain of the place, the hour, the work in her hands, and the very stitches, she looked again. There was the face still, ugly, pale, and cruel—the very face that had so disturbed Florian during the winter in Washington. She could see nothing else. A feeling of horror began to creep over her, a nervous dread that the terrible sight would direct its glances to her; but she was so fascinated, and terrified, and doubtful of herself, that she did not venture to move, only sat there staring and fearing and waiting like a criminal until it disappeared.

It became known the next day that a foreign gentleman was stopping at the Fisherman's Retreat; and this was the first piece of information which was hurled at Billy when he made his appearance next morning to institute inquiries as to the stranger with the mysterious countenance. He could speak but very little English, seemed to be a sort of Dutchman, and impressed the people very favorably. He made himself acquainted, by sight at least, with all the villagers, and was more talked about than if he were the president. One day he would spend his time wandering about the docks, watching the boats or the stormy waves; another he would be seen in this or that quarter staring, simply staring.

Père Rougevin, reading his weekly *Freeman* after dinner, was moved to look out of the window by a passing shadow, and saw the stranger's face the very first moment, thinking it very disagreeable. The stranger was looking at the church—a plain, homely affair not worth inspection—but it pleased him so much that he came in to ask by signs for permission to enter. The Père spoke to him in French, German

and English, but he shook his head, muttering very raw syllables.

"You are a Russian," said the priest; and the man made a dubious gesture which was translated as an affirmative by the light that spread into his stolid, unpleasant face. The priest went out with him, and he looked over the church solemnly, examining some parts curiously, and with a bow withdrew when he was satisfied, with many signs of gratitude.

"I think we had better look to our valuables while he is in town," said the priest to his servant; "he would not hesitate to murder us, I fear, for it is seldom one sees so ugly a countenance."

Coming down the road one fair morning in time to meet the train, Squire Pendleton's ponderous glances rested sorrowfully on the marble shaft which bore Linda's name, and then brightened a little at sight of a stranger examining the monument and the grave. Who could this be? The Squire had heard of the new-comer and the mystery that surrounded him, and this he felt to be the man. He came down the road as the Squire passed, and gave that gentleman an opportunity to put on his most awe-inspiring, Mackenzie's rebellion look, and to roll forth a sonorous good-morning, to which no answer was given, nor did the great personage seem to inspire the stranger with any respect.

"I said good-morning, sir," he repeated with restrained force; and the stranger, beginning to comprehend the drift of his remarks, bowed and smiled but said nothing.

"Foreigner, I suppose," thought the Squire, with

contempt. "Lucky for you that you recognized my greeting, or it would have been all the worse for us two. I saw you surveying that pretty monument on the hill," continued he. "Nice stone, beats Italian marble all to smash; wears well for the climate. After next election we don't import any more stone—oh! no. Cut and carved by home talent. In a century or so we shall discount your sculptors fifty per cent. We've got the money and the brains, but we need time—time."

This was what the Squire called tall talk, and was bestowed only on foreigners who looked like sneerers at republicanism. But the stranger grunted something like "pshaw" in answer to the tall talk.

"Sir," said the Squire most villainously, "do I understand you to say 'pshaw' to my remarks?"

The gentleman bowed and smiled in so doubtful a way that Pendleton knew not how to take it, but concluded that his intentions were not insulting. At this interesting crisis the whistle of the approaching train brought Pendleton to his senses, and he fled for the depot with all speed, more eager to be at his post than to quarrel with a mere foreigner. Interest in the supposed Russian became so deep as to reach the hermit of Solitary Island. Squire Pendleton caught Scott on the dock one day, on the point of returning to his solitude. The usual group of loiterers was close by, among them the stranger and the priest.

"We have a curiosity here," the Squire said to Scott, "a real Russian that has done more in one week to upset this town than any other man could do in a year. I won't say why, for I'm anxious to see if

he strikes you as he strikes most people. He's a Russian, didn't you say, Père Rougevin?"

"I supposed so," said the Père, "from his looks and his language."

"He's pretty far out of his way, then," the hermit said, pulling down his cap in readiness to start.

"Wait and have a look at him," said the Squire; "here he is."

The stranger appeared at this moment and stood, in profile to the group, unconscious that the hermit's sharp eyes were upon him. Pendleton watched for the changes he expected to see in Scott's face, but he was disappointed.

"Hard-lookin' sinner," Scott said, as he swung the canoe around and paddled off.



## CHAPTER XV.

### A BARBECUE.

ALL the letters which reached Florian from his native town during the summer nearly brought him to despair by their terrific descriptions of the mysterious stranger. One day there arrived a note, posted in a place unknown, warning him to be on his guard against the man, for he meant him evil. It was plain that this individual was making himself familiar with Florian's affairs. A man does not meddle without an object. Florian felt himself in possible danger. His first impulse was to put the matter in a detective's hands, but after reflection he decided to take another course. Recalling that he had once seen Count Vladimir and the stranger in conversation, it occurred to him that he had opened himself to the Count with unnecessary frankness, and had told him enough about his past life to make the work of a spy trivial and successful. Vladimir and he had become very good friends, and the young nobleman had come to New York for the sole purpose of seeing political life under the guidance of his distinguished friend. It was not difficult to acquire an affection for the young fellow, and Florian deeply admired him. He was handsome, open-hearted, and engaging, and sinned with such thoughtlessness and relish that the grave Congress-

man often wished his own disposition had as little malice. In the presence of so attractive a scamp his own correct notions looked a little odd and silly, and he occasionally dropped a few of them in order to seem of a similar nature to this butterfly. However, to be thoroughly deceived by this boy, to have all his life drawn from him that it might furnish matter for a spy's recreation, was galling! He did not allow it to disturb him, however, and when he visited the Count showed no feeling in mentioning the incident of the mysterious stranger.

"My dear Count," said he, "I have no objection whatever to an inquiry into my past life, but if I am to furnish the material I have a right to know the object. What possible interest can you have in ferreting out an open record? My life from birth has not been remarkable and has no mysteries. I could have saved you some trouble if you had come to me in the beginning and stated the matter candidly."

The Count had just risen from sleep and looked pale and heavy. "The work I had to do," said he, "required secrecy for two reasons: that it might be more deftly done, and might awaken no unreasonable hopes in the bosoms of American citizens whose birthright of freedom they would not exchange for an earldom."

"That," said Florian, "is tolerated on the Fourth of July only."

"Well, be it known, my friend, that I am commissioned by the Prince Louis of Cracow, father of that Prince Louis to whom you bear so remarkable a resemblance, to search for two or more of his relatives who came to this country just thirty years ago.

It is whispered that the good prince, whose character is not of the best, was under the necessity of doing some dirty work years ago that he might get into his present lordly position. He trumped up a charge against a young and noble relative; said relative fled with two children to this country; the prince entered upon his relative's possessions, and the story ended. Now, in his old age, Prince Louis fears for his wealth and standing. He begins to look for a Nemesis. To escape it he commissions me to find the exiled prince or his children, and settle with them for a respectable sum to remain here and leave him in the enjoyment of his estates. He gave me some portraits to help the search. You so closely resembled one of them that I took you for a possible heir and began to inquire into your antecedents. I shall now show you the portraits. First, do you hold me absolved from any crime against your fame and honor?"

"By all means," said Florian. "You have proceeded admirably, but you are on a wrong scent, my friend, though I must say I regret it."

"And why, if I may ask?"

"I would like to barter for the mess of pottage with Prince Louis; money is more to me now than a princeship or a kingship."

"Money, money, money! It is the one cry that makes itself distinctly heard amid the jargon I have endured since I came to this country."

"The portraits, the portraits," said Florian impatiently. Vladimir brought them out from an inner room and placed them for his inspection. The faces were done in oil and well executed. The first

was a young man with reddish hair and smooth, delicate face, of too fine a nature evidently to cope with the gross wickedness of the material villain, his relative; and the second a lovely woman of dark complexion, whose sweet face was indicative of great strength of character.

"I should fancy this woman would not take very well to flight," he said after a pause. "She would hold her castle to the end."

"So she did, and died," the Count responded. "There are more ways than one of bringing an enemy to terms."

Two children of lovely appearance took up the third case, and Florian laughed at the idea of these being taken for himself and dead Linda. There was no resemblance, except that the eyes of the boy were of a brown color and the dark eyes of the girl sparkled with some of Linda's mischievousness. But between himself and the exiled prince there certainly was a very striking resemblance, and it extended in a lighter degree to the portrait of the princess. The Count watched him closely as he examined the pictures, to see what impression they made on him; but Florian felt only disappointment.

"Has your Russian friend reported to you yet?" he asked. "For I suppose I have some right to know."

"He has," the Count answered frankly; "but he had nothing more to say than that you did not resemble your father or mother, and had not been baptized in Clayburgh."

"True, and I could not say where I really was baptized. But if you wish it we shall go together

to Clayburgh and interview my parents and friends. It is a queer time of day to bring up questions of my paternity. We shall have to proceed cautiously for two reasons. My mother is nervous and my father hot-tempered, and inquiries among the townspeople, if too open, might act unpleasantly on my good name."

"Oh! I assure you the whole matter will be conducted most honorably and delicately. Allow me to thank you for your kind offer. I accept at once, and having done with you I shall proceed to persecute some other individual. But I have your pardon, Florian, for my want of candor? I was so fearful of——"

"Not a word. I only wish you had succeeded in proving me a prince. It would have been a great help in my political life. Let me advise you. Get rid of your troublesome friend, and do not use him as a—an agent. His face is against him."

"He is a helpful fellow and a good fellow. But his face *is* against him, although I do not pay attention to it now. He disturbed you, it seems. He impressed you as——"

"An assassin," said Florian, with an outburst of long restrained disgust and horror.

"Ah!" was all the Count said, and Florian could not tell why the simple exclamation set him wondering as he went away.

The train which one summer evening rushed into Clayburgh depot had Florian and the Count in one of its coaches. When the old familiar landmarks which he had known and loved as a boy began to appear, and when for the first time in eight years he saw

the strip of bay over which he had sailed so often, and sniffed the fresh water breeze, lily-scented, a scale seemed to fall from his eyes and a shell from his body. They left the bustle of the depot behind them, and, on reaching the top of the short hill, Florian made the Count look at the twilight beauty of the scene. Vladimir was not an admirer of scenery, but he looked and saw the waters covered with long, shifting lights from the west where a faint red glow shone, and the distant islands, visible only by the lights of dwellings there. A feeble moon threw silver flashes where the darkness was deepest. The line of docks was a forest of masts with their red and green and white lights showing like stars against the sky, and over the hubbub of the travelers at the depot could be heard occasionally the singers in the boats far out on the calm river.

"The stillness is quite oppressive," said the Count with a shiver, as they turned into the garden of Wallace's home.

"It is a place to make you think," said Florian, pointedly.

"Heaven save me from that," laughed the Count. "It is the one glory of my life, and its joy, that of all men I can think least."

Florian entered the house without any ado, and left his valise in the square room which once belonged to him. To the servant who came to inspect the intruders he gave the message for his mother that Florian had come home. The Count was a trifle curious as he heard the hurried, timorous step in the hall, and he watched Mrs. Winifred closely as she

appeared, dressed in plain black, with her white pointed cap lying across her smooth hair. She was in an exceedingly nervous state and hardly noticed Vladimir's title, calling him Mr. Countbrenski a moment after the introduction. Preparing two rooms for the gentlemen, and seeing them retire to brush off the dust of the journey, gave her an opportunity to settle down into her usual placidity, which she did in Linda's room, where she sat crying and murmuring to the darkness, "O Linda! he has come back again." The Count was so delighted at not finding in Florian the faintest resemblance to his mother that he grew eager to begin work at once.

"I have still less resemblance to my father," said Florian. "But it would not do to scare my mother by broaching so abruptly an important matter. The idea of trying to prove her son the property of another woman! Your object would certainly be frustrated by such haste. You would get no information at all."

As Vladimir had asked the favor of being made acquainted with all the circumstances of Florian's birth as soon as possible, the examination was held the next morning after breakfast. Mr. and Mrs. Buck were present, and, with Mr. Billy Wallace, were informed of the reasons of the visit. Billy was highly amused, and Sara felt the inspiring charm of acting a part in a real romance. The Count saw in the manner of each member of the family that fate was against him. Father and mother might have shown a little agitation, and so have given a hope that their astonishment was but assumed.

Billy, however, chuckled constantly, and Mrs. Winifred was as placid as usual.

"Seemingly," said she, with great composure, "we lived behind Russell's Camp for a number of years."

"We might have been there yet but for your tinkering." Billy snapped, with a sudden and vivid recollection of damages sustained in leaving the camp.

"Thank Heaven we are out of it, the horrid place!" said Sara. "I would never have met Mr. Buck there nor anybody; and where would you be now, my blessed little Florian?"

"The Protestant brat!" barked the grandfather, patting the child's head with secret tenderness.

"It was there Florian came to us, and Sara, and Linda, and one younger child who died before we left the place. Seemingly, none of the children were baptized in a church."

"How could they be?" Billy jerked out. "There wasn't a church in fifty miles."

"How terrible!" said Sara for the Count's benefit, "to be deprived of the consolations of religion——"

One withering look from Billy ended this speech, and, in fear of an outbreak, Mrs. Winifred burst in with, "Père Rivet baptized our children and took the records with him to Montreal, I suppose. I couldn't say where. But seemingly, it troubled me. For if Florian had wished to be a priest we had no certificate of baptism."

"Not much trouble to you now," sneered Billy; "he's a Congressman, the devil!—the very opposite of a priest. And your grandson, with a certificate



handy, is to be a minister. Think of that, Count—think of that, sir.”

“We moved here,” said Mrs. Winifred patiently, “when Florian was about five years old, and here we have lived since.”

“Are you satisfied?” said Florian, and the Count nodded in some hesitation.

“I must apologize to you,” he said, addressing the family, “for the trouble I have given you——”

“Oh! I assure you,” Sara broke in, “it has been a very great pleasure. Just like a novel, indeed.”

“I must thank you for the kind manner in which you have humored me. I am satisfied,” laughing gayly, “that your son is your own. I shall never again trouble you in this way.”

“But in other ways,” said Sara, “we shall be so happy to serve you. Some troubles are real pleasures.”

“Not such troubles as you, you devil!” said Eilly.

“But such troubles as this,” she answered good-naturedly, holding young Florian close to the wrinkled face; and the grandfather was forced to smile and chuckle in spite of himself. The morning conference was broken up by the stentorian voice of the Squire at the front gate welcoming Florian to the arms of his native town. At his back were a half-dozen of the fathers of the village, anxious and happy to greet the lion of the fold, the standard-bearer of Juda, their David in the ranks of the Philistines. Vladimir shuddered at the grasp which each of the ancients in turn gave to Florian and kept two books in his hands during the ceremony of introduction.

"Glad to see you, Count," said the Squire. "You are a rare bird in this part of the country, but I met a dozen of you in New York when I was there. Boys, this is a real, live Russian count, imported from Moscow, and Florian's friend. He's to be included in the reception we're to give Flory at noon. You'll make a speech, of course."

The very decided refusal of the Count was drowned in the clamor which all present raised in behalf of the speech.

"The ladies of the whole town will be present," said Sara, "and it would be too bad to deny them the pleasure of hearing a count talk."

"Is not this a republican country?" said Vladimir.

"Oh! but you are a rarity," Florian replied, "and must be heard as well as seen. You are on exhibition like myself."

"It is the one thing of this country—self-exhibition," the Count muttered in a disgusted undertone, but aloud he said blandly, "If the ladies wish it I am their slave."

"How delightful!" thought Sara. "He talks just like an earl."

Mrs. Winifred had been sitting quietly observant of the proceedings, and now tumbled into her son's lap in a dead faint; whereupon the elders gathered about her in a close-pressed gang, and the Count, having been caught between them with his protecting books in his hands, got such a democratic squeezing as he had never before experienced.

"This never happened before in her whole life," said Billy, with tremulous lips, as she began to show

signs of returning life. Florian whispered to the Count, who followed him into the garden.

"It's a good time to get away," he said. "That deputation would keep us till noon, when I wish you to see the islands and a hermit friend of mine."

They went down the street to the dock below the depot, and in a few minutes Florian had hired a boat and hoisted the sail to a favorable breeze. A few loungers stood on the shore and watched curiously the ordinary human motions of so queer creatures as a politician and a count. They soon left the river and entered the curved channel which passed into the Bay of Tears. And like a transformation scene the narrow passage, in which the waters mingled their murmurs with the sighing of the trees, widened on the instant into a glorious bay where the waters slept in the sunlight and a silver-white mist lingered in the air. Even the indifferent Count was touched.

"Your hermit has a royal dwelling," said he, "when such a vestibule leads to it."

"We shall see," Florian replied. A short run up the Canadian side of the river brought them to the landing-place. "This is the royal residence," said he to the Count as they anchored. To the disappointment of both, the hermit was not at home, but everything was in its old place, even the copy of *Izaak Walton*; and Florian saw with delight the absence of change, as if he had been gone but a day!

"This is the nearest approach to eternity that man can make. There has been no change here in twenty years, and I suppose the furniture of his brain and his heart are in the same placid condition. Such a man endures death with philosophy."

"Nonsense!" the Count said, "on the contrary, he is always unprepared for so violent a change. With me, a worldling, death is one of those incidents which make life charming. There is a risk in holding life's jewel. Now, this hermit, as I suppose, is wildly virtuous, an ascetic——"

"No, no. He is sedate, stoical, serious, but not a devotee."

"Then he has taken to this life from a love of it, and not because a companion was struck dead by lightning at his side or because he had already exhausted the world?"

"I would like to hear himself answer those insinuations. It would take all your cynicism and wit to match him. Above all men he despises an indifferentist."

"What do you call this?" said the Count, holding up a delicate handkerchief between his thumb and finger. "Was it not one such that damned poor Desdemona?"

"As I live," replied Florian, examining the article, "my hermit has strange visitors occasionally."

There were no marks by which its owner might be known, but the keen eyes of the Count detected the letter "W" which had been worked with colored silk at one corner, and the color had faded.

"An initial belonging to you," said he, pointing it out. Florian looked at it thoughtfully for a few moments.

"It is just possible," he said, pressing the handkerchief to his lips, "that this is a relic of Linda—poor Linda! If so it would be a pity to deprive him

of what must be dear to him. He thought so much of the child."

He put it between the leaves of *Izaak Walton* reverently.

"Now for the reception," he said, as they set sail for the town.

A crowd had gathered on one of the wharves, and a band was playing under the shadow of innumerable flags and banners, while cheering, shouts, and yells were faintly borne over the water. A carriage was in waiting and they took the last place in a procession of which the band had the first, and did it justice. The ride was short. They were transferred to a hotel balcony, which gave them the opportunity of seeing their admirers in an agony of exhaustion, sitting on the curbstones of the street, on barrels and boxes and staircases, and leaning out of windows in heart-breaking attitudes, while the sun beat down on them, and the band blared about and through them, dividing with the Count the attention of the multitude. Everyone was red, and every one had a handkerchief with which he mopped and reddened the more his perspiring face. Only one cool, shaded spot stood in view, on the opposite side of the street, where under a protecting canopy sat the well dressed leading ladies of the town, headed by Reverend Mrs. Buck, and leveling opera-glasses at the titled victim of one part of this ovation.

When the brass band had wound up its disturbance with one prolonged crash of powerful melody the Squire stepped forward amid cheers. With his back to Florian and his face to the crowd he welcomed to

his native town this admirable specimen of the political youth of the time, congratulated him on the eminence he had won in the service of his country, prophesied his future glories and the glories he would reflect on Clayburgh, and pledged to him the eternal, the undying, the immortal, solid, uninterrupted fidelity and esteem of the citizens of the town. Amid a second round of cheering Florian took his place and endeavored to out-adjective the Squire in one of his most telling spread-eagle speeches. There was some mixed speaking afterwards on the part of noteworthy elders anxious to put their opinions on record, to whom the crowd paid no attention, but, with many wishes that the dinner might not interfere with their talking powers, and with considerable laughing scattered homewards, while the tired and heated Count was led into the dining-room and placed at his seat amid a hubbub too horrible for description.

These hot, red-faced, perspiring Yankees were still full of spirits and appetite. It was dreadful to see what hungry looks they cast at the dishes, as if the noise and confusion of the procession and the speech-making were incentives to appetite. Knives, tongues, and dishes clattered in unison; waiters ran hither and thither, in and out, tripped and sprawled, as if their reputations depended on the absurdities they were performing; the elders upset gravy-bowls and vinegar cruets with social equanimity; everything was put on the table at once; everybody shouted his thoughts to his neighbor; steam rose from every dish like a cloud, and around each man's plate was grouped an army of smaller dishes, to which his

neighbor helped himself with genial freedom! In the center sat the Honorable Florian, the cause of all the trouble, calm, cool, and elegant, full of good spirits, his pleasant voice rising above the din and roaring encouragement at his friend, until the band broke loose and sat upon all rivalry with a completeness that made the Count feel as if he were eating that awe-inspiring music.

"Down south they call this a barbecue," the Squire shouted at him across the table, where he struggled with a roast standing; "this is, of course, a leetle milder."

"Oh! considerably milder," said an ancient, "considerably, Squire."

"Ya'as," drawled another. "I suppose it's only a shadow of a real barbecue. The Southerners air apt to dew things with a rush, bein' a leetle fiery."

"That's where you'd see fun," the Squire continued. "But still this is a pretty good specimen of a high old time. Of course with——"

A burst from the band crushed the words back into his mouth. The Squire continued to roar, and the Count nodded politely while pretending not to see his neighbor carry off his green peas. The gentleman had said: "Seein' as you don't take to them 'ear, I'll try 'em."

After a time Vladimir passed into a dreamy state in which he seemed to be the center of a revolving machine. He rather liked it on the whole, and as the motion grew slower and slower he began to realize that the table was cleared, the Yankees satisfied, and Florian was speaking in the midst of a great and pleasant silence. Some comic singing followed, there

was a general handshaking, of which he had a share, and finally he was conducted to the quiet of the Wallace home.

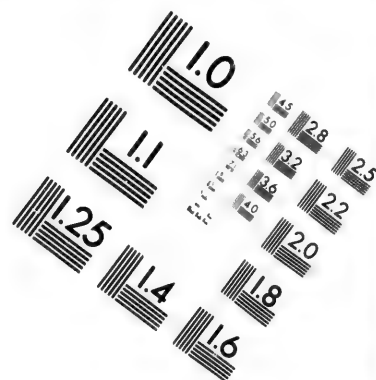
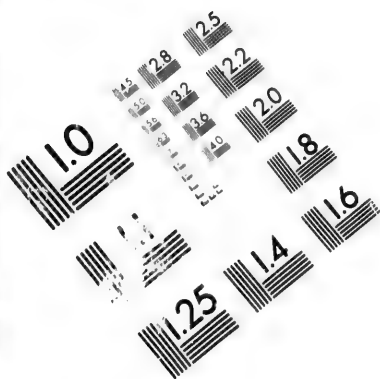
"How did you like it?" said Florian, when they had changed their clothing and sat looking at the sun shedding his latest glories on the river.

"I feel as if I had been through a campaign. If my greatest enemy had done this his revenge could not have been more complete. We have been here but twenty-four hours. I feel as if it had been as many years."

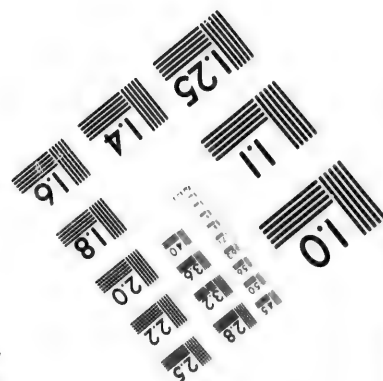
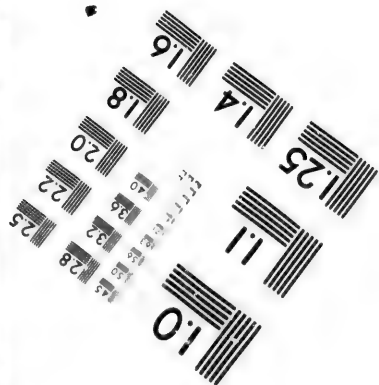
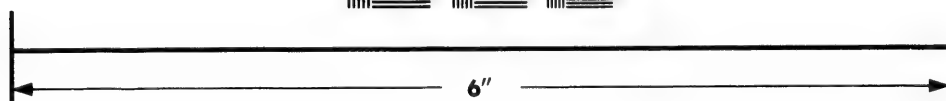
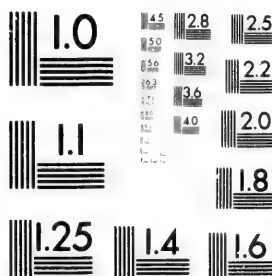
"We go to-morrow," said Florian with a sigh. "I would like it to last forever."

"Since it can't," answered the Count solemnly, "amen."



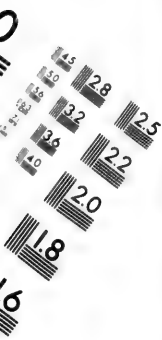


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## CHAPTER XVI.

### ROSSITER'S LUCK.

A COOLNESS arose between Florian and the poet after Ruth's departure. Without any clear reason for it, the two men avoided each other, and drifted utterly apart by degrees. Ruth's face began to haunt the poet once more; some words from gossipers on her conversion had waked from a transient sleep a fancy he had thought dead and buried. He did not care to indulge the fancy, partly from pride, mostly because the world was not treating him well at that moment. Work was scarce, and money scarcer. Fatigue and worry had told upon him, and just then occurred something which put a finishing touch to his misery. Returning from a tiresome interview with a manager he stopped for a moment to look at a shop window, and became conscious of some one staring at him rudely from within. He looked up. The same disagreeable face which had haunted Washington and Clayburgh so unpleasantly had fastened its intent, evil gaze on him. Although he went on his way cheerfully afterwards, he did not know what a power this face had of reproducing itself in the memory, until it had remorselessly haunted him twenty-four hours. It came up at every turn of thought, luminous and frightful.

"I wonder what it means?" he said to Peter one

evening. Peter had been speaking with an energy born of liquor, and had brought down his fist several times on the table after asserting that something was diabolical. "What does it mean?" cried he. "It means that you're no man, or ye wouldn't sit there and see him walk off with Frances before yer two eyes, you omadhaun!"

"Who?" said the poet in wide-eyed wonder.

"That gizzard, of course," snarled Peter.

"On that track again, hey? Pshaw, Peter! I don't care for Frances, nor she for me. We couldn't live on the same floor without quarreling."

"Before marriage, perhaps," said Peter, "but after——" A knock at the door interrupted him, and he opened it to admit the servant bearing a card for Mr. Rossiter.

"Read it," said Paul.

Peter took up the card and read:

"'Mr. Wallace's compliments to Mr. Rossiter. Would he favor Mr. Wallace by coming to his room to meet the Count Vladimir Behrenski, a noted litterateur, anxious to make your acquaintance?' What new trick is this?"

"I'm going down," said Paul, and he went.

The resemblance between Paul and Florian has been spoken of, and it was a notable circumstance with their acquaintances. At the first sight the more delicate physique and lighter complexion of the poet did not make the likeness striking or impressive, but on acquaintance it increased forcibly, and the invariable question was, are they brothers or relatives? When Florian saw for the first time the features of his supposed father, the Prince, in the portraits, he was

struck by the remarkable likeness to Paul Rossiter. Of this fact he said nothing to the Count until that gentleman had been satisfied as to his identity with the son of Mr. and Mrs. Wallace. When they had returned to New York, and he was one day at the Count's residence, he asked to see the portrait of the Russian prince once more. "There is a young gentleman at Madame Lynch's" he said, "who looks more like this picture than I do. He has the prince's eyes and hair, which I have not."

"But you have the soul of the prince in your face," said the Count shrewdly, "which he has not."

"Then you know of his existence?" said Florian.

"I heard of it yesterday," the Count replied, indifferently, "and I was about to ask for an introduction. I have a presentiment that the son of the exiled prince will be found in either of you."

"What! have you not gotten over your infatuation in my regard? Were you not satisfied with the Wallace credentials?"

"Highly satisfied. But I spoke only of presentiment."

"When I first saw this portrait," said Florian, "I said to myself, this is the poet—for he is a poet, you know. But I thought it best to settle my own claims first, as I had a secret hope that I might be the princely child you sought."

"Ah," said the Count, "you are eager for assassination."

"Pshaw!" said Florian, "wouldn't the Prince of Cracow prefer buying me off than running the risk of having a crime laid to his charge?"

"Yes," said Vladimir; "but he has an idea you

could not be bought. You Americans have such a greed for titles."

"For our own," said Florian, "not for yours. I would sell my princship for a reasonable sum, and buy a governorship here, which would be more to me than anything in a European kingdom. Will you call on the poet? And if so, what will be your plan of action?"

"I shall call on him and frankly state the reason of the visit."

And it so happened that Paul received Florian's card the same evening and was introduced to the Count. After some desultory conversation Vladimir broached the subject of his visit and showed the portraits to Paul.

"It is a very good picture of me," said the poet coolly, "but it can be no more than an accidental resemblance."

"Would you have any objections," the Count politely asked, "to give me means of satisfying my employer by documentary evidence that you are not the man he seeks?"

"I have been through the mill," said Florian, "and I can do the Count the justice of saying that his conduct has been that of a gentleman. For him your word is sufficient, but the Prince Louis must have something more."

"I am afraid," said Paul gravely, "that the Prince as well as the Count must be content with my simple word. There is nothing in my history that justifies the slightest hope that I can be the man. The past I prefer to leave undisturbed. I am sorry that I cannot oblige you."

There was some agitation in his manner, but his determination was evident and the Count could only express his regrets. Florian did not dare to hint in Vladimir's presence that a score of detectives would probably be soon at work to lay bare the story of his life, and the conversation drifted into other channels until the poet took his leave. While his footsteps echoed in the hall there was a short silence.

"Rossiter's conduct," said Florian, "strengthens your case considerably."

"I don't know," the Count answered dubiously. "It may one way and it may not another. He is sincere, and yet apprehends trouble from discovering himself. It does not matter—for the present."

He went out reciting his favorite maxim of human philosophy with a smiling face and gay air. At home, the gentleman whose peculiar features had already caused so much disturbance in many places was waiting for him, and began to speak in a low, sullen, dull way before greeting him. The conversation was in Russian.

"Have you found out something new about this young man?"

"Nothing," said Vladimir; "he is what he is and no more."

"He is the son of Prince Paul," said the other angrily; "no one can deceive me. His name is Paul, is it not?"

"Yes, but he is not the man I think. You were so certain about Wallace; why have you changed?"

"Give me his native place. We are delaying too much. Give me his native place, and I will do it

all in a day. Give me whatever you have found out about him and hasten."

The Count silently and contemptuously lit a cigar and sat down comfortably under a most malignant glare from the man's eyes.

"My dear Nicholas," he said blandly, "you are too quick and too impertinent. I found out nothing concerning this princeling, save that he had nothing to tell. You will have to begin from the beginning"—Nicholas made a gesture of despair—"but you are sharp, you are unwearied, you are devoted, and you will find it all soon enough."

"What do you think of him?" said Nicholas.

"I think nothing, it lies between these two."

"Then this Paul is the man," he interrupted. "I know the father—I knew them all, father and son. There is a quick way to settle this matter." And he made a murderous gesture with his arm.

"Too fast," the Count replied, shaking his head; "that trick is too new in this country to be played safely, although if any one could do it cunningly you are that one. No, Nicholas, you must be more careful of your master's character. He relies on you chiefly. There must be no blood cast on his honorable name."

"There are ways of killing without shedding blood," said Nicholas—"without steel or rope—if I might try."

The Count pretended not to hear him and went off into an inner room, while with an evil smile the man departed to execute his mission. It might have been a result of this conversation that matters began to get worse with Rossiter. He seemed to have dis-



covered all at once a knack of offending his few patrons, and in spite of Peter's efforts and his own, it became more and more difficult to earn the pittance that supported him. His strength and spirit were leaving him together. Hack-work was a treadmill to his soul, and when at last employers began to sprinkle their stingy crusts with ashes as they handed them out, he stayed at home, and dreamed for hours of the two faces that haunted him, the calm face of Ruth, and the cruel visage of the spy.

Peter's anxieties and mutterings drew madame's attention to the matter. She took a kindly interest in the lonely poet, was happy to be of service to him, and called on him to assure him of her sympathy and to promise her influence in getting him a position; and Frances came up often with Peter and was very witty and quarrelsome to raise his spirits. From these kindly visits Peter evolved a bright syllogism whose conclusion struck him with the force of a tornado. Madame and her daughter were about to take advantage of Paul's weakness and arrange the long-deferred marriage of the young people. Paul's noble sacrifices in behalf of the poor, his patient endurance of misfortune, his piety and beauty, had at length become irresistible in the girl's heart. Now was the time to strike a telling blow in favor of his pet project. He waited a few days until madame had made herself conspicuous in Paul's interest, until Frances had ministered his sad soul into cheerfulness, and then Peter's diplomacy began to move about like the bull in the china shop. He hurried one day into madame's presence, and burst out with—

"He's dying, that b'y is dying an' ye have only yourselves to blame for it."

"Do you mean Mr. Rossiter?" said madame terribly frightened.

"Don't get excited, ma'am. There's no immediate harm done, but between ye, ye are killin' the b'y."

"Oh!" said madame, "one of your freaks, I suppose."

"A woman of your years an' experience," said Peter, looking at her with uneasy glances, "ought to be better able to get at the bottom o' things than ye are, instead o' leaving such work to be done by your boarders. There's no use breaking your neck running over the city to find out the cause o' Paul's illness, when it's here in the house, as large as a young lady can be."

Madame sat provokingly quiet awaiting the point of his eloquence.

"Can't you see that he's in love with your daughter?" said Peter angrily.

"No," said madame composedly; "is he?"

"Nothing less than marrying her will cure him; an' it's a shame to have her waiting for the good pleasure of the man without a heart, with a real live poet wasting away in a garret because of her. He'd write beautiful verses for her all her life, while from the Congressman divil a thing else she'll hear but dry speeches an' the like."

"Did Mr. Rossiter tell you he was in love with Frances, and commission you to plead his cause for him?"

"Ay, that he did, ma'am; for no one ever stood

his friend as well as Peter. When he was feeling bad over his own weakness who else would he choose? 'Never mind,' says I, 'I'll let out the cause of it;' an' he thanked me with two tears in his eyes. If there's a heart in ye at all ye'll see that he's rescued from the grave by giving him Frances. She's crazy after him, the poor girl."

"Have you spoken of this to others?" said Madame icily.

"No; I think not. I might have, but——"

"If you ever do," said Madame, "it will be your ruin. My interest in Mr. Rossiter ceases from this instant, and he must depart at once from this house. Such an insult to my daughter—such a poor, ungentlemanly return for all my kindness. It is shameful."

Peter walked out stupid from humiliation.

The effects of his interference were direful. Madame and her daughter ceased to visit the attic, and Paul received the intimation that as soon as convenient the attic would be let to a more desirable lodger. There was, of course, an instant demand for explanation. Paul, looking wofully pale and wretched, came down from his room and begged to know if this was of a piece with his other misfortunes. Madame explained in a distant way, which set Paul laughing as he pictured to himself the manner in which Peter must have executed his self-imposed task. He declared earnestly that he had never spoken of such a thing even in jest, and had no deeper regard for Frances than he had for herself. It pained him to see that while Madame accepted his declaration, she did not withdraw her

note nor drop the unusual coldness of her manner, while his request to apologize to Frances was politely ignored.

He returned to his room, weighed down with sadness, but outwardly cheerful. One must carry his cross with a good heart. His possessions were few and his wardrobe limited. He packed up a few articles that evening, locked the door, and gave the key to the servant, with instructions to have the furniture sold and the money given to Madame. He had tried vainly to see Peter. On a chilly, but clear night in early spring, he went out into the streets of New York almost a beggar, as he had once entered the city, having no place to lay his head, entirely bereft of friends save among the poor, sad and down-cast, but still full of the hope which had always been his chief capital. He had enough money to assist him in carrying out his designs. He needed change of scene and rest, and he had decided that a few months spent in the country districts, traveling, as only the impecunious know how to travel, out in the open air, among the mountains and lakes of the north, would once more set him in trim for the battle of life. He was not altogether cast down, and had no suicidal tendencies, nor even a very natural longing for death. There were many pleasant incidents ahead of him which, with the bracing air of night, gave his blood a new energy of flow.

He took a northward train, and near morning was landed at a pretty village half-way up the Hudson. It was not a pleasant hour for entering a town, the air being chilly and the sun still in bed along with the villagers. Officials were sleepy and

impolite, and the silent, echoing streets, the ghostly spires and eminences, had a heavy influence on a heavy heart. The bells of a distant convent were ringing, and, smiting softly on his ear, brought a flush to his pale cheeks. He turned his steps towards the sound. His thoughts went back to that happier time when Ruth's face had first stirred in him aspirations and fancies. It had been many months since she stood in the world. She was hiding in the convent whose bells brought the blood to his cheek and quickened his unconscious step. What she was doing there he had never heard; why he was visiting the place he had not asked himself, but a vague longing to see her again and to learn something definite of one who had unconsciously filled a large space in his life urged him on. He knew that she thought of him with gratitude. He had been the first to open her eyes to her real position, and she felt that whatever of happiness her new life had given her was owing in fair measure to him. After Mass he called upon the Superior of the convent.

"Some years ago," he said, "a lady friend of mine came here to reside. She was a Miss Pendleton, a Protestant, who had leaned towards the faith. I have heard so little of her since that time that I am anxious to know what has become of her."

"Miss Pendleton," said the mother superior, smiling, "is now Sister St. Clare, a novice in our order. She has been a Catholic almost since her arrival, but until a year ago did not consider that she had a vocation for the religious life."

"She is well, I trust and happy?"

"Very well indeed, and apparently content and cheerful."

He was longing to ask permission to see her, but knew that it was against the rules.

"Will you oblige me"—handing her his card—"by giving Sister St. Clare my kind regards and best wishes, and asking her prayers for one who has great need of them. I am glad to know that she has found rest. Some day when she is professed I may be able to call on her."

He went away sadder but pleased at the good fortune which had come to a noble soul. All day long he haunted the grounds, sketching the buildings and looking with moist eyes towards that part where the novices spent their leisure hours. Insensibly his thoughts strayed away into dreamland, and he began to draw on a bit of bristol-board the outlines of Ruth's face as he had seen it last, very troubled, yet shining with the light of a new-born grace. He looked at his finished work, grief-stricken, yet patient. Was he never to whisper into her ears the secret of his heart? Never! For another more noble than he had claimed her, and he could but write around the chill outline his name and hers intertwined, with the words, "I love you," twisted about in every fashion. The sun rose hot and red in the noonday sky, and hunger drove him to the village. He left the bit of bristol-board in the convent grounds, nor did he miss it until the next morning when he was many a mile from the place. He would have returned for it on the instant but that he remembered the rain-storm of the preceding night. The sketch

lying six hours in the rain would now be a mass of unsightly pulp!

He had no fixed plans for his journey. He went wherever fancy and circumstance led him, and wandered for months by the Hudson, on the shores of Lake George and Lake Champlain, along the St. Lawrence, and among the Thousand Islands—places little frequented in those days. His arrival at Clayburgh was pure accident, but once there he awoke to sudden interest in Ruth's home. He had not improved much in his open-air trappings. Whether his heavy heart retarded recovery, neutralizing the effect of change of scene, fresh air, and exercise, or his carelessness led him into fresh disorders, the day at least which found him looking on Clayburgh from the top of the island described in the opening chapter was a day of special physical misery to him. And this was the village where she had lived and grown to a sweet womanhood! How pretty its spires looked in the morning sun, and how fresh the wind which blew from it to him! He sat under the shade of the stunted tree with his eye fixed gloomily on the water, and wondered when his present self was to end. He was depressed enough to wish that it would find its conclusion here. She was lost to him forever, and he would rest among the scenes which she had loved.

"Sick," said a voice beside him. Scott was standing there.

"No," he answered, "not sick in body."

The sigh which followed the words told the poet's story very plainly, and Scott studied his pale face with attentive interest. He somewhat resembled

Florian. Usually the hermit left strangers to themselves as speedily as possible. Now he said :

"When sorrows begin to knock a man down it's part of his nature that he should knock down in turn. If he doesn't he must expect a kickin' as well. I dunno but he deserves it."

Paul looked up in surprise, and for the first time surveyed his companion. He saw nothing, however, to astonish him, but the words of the hermit rang in his ears pleasantly.

"Easy to talk," said he, "but cleverly said. It is like meeting a friend to hear such words; and I have no friends."

"None?" said the other distrustfully. "A man must have done some pretty mean things to get like that."

"Perhaps the meanest thing I did was to run away from misfortune instead of facing it and letting it do its worst. The friends I had God took from me for a good purpose which I have been slow to acknowledge. Never mind. I will go back to New York soon. I thought I was dying; that my tide of fortune, not taken at the full, was ebbing. It was a mistake. I shall return, no doubt."

"A man sometimes runs too far," was dryly said, "to make gittin' back safe or necessary. Find a good battleground here, and wait for your enemies."

Paul looked at him a long time in silent thought, and then at the scene around him.

"What do you do for a living?"

"Fish, hunt, plough for myself an' no other. I live alone among these islands, an' when I've done prayin' for myself I give some time to thinkin' of



my brothers in the world. I never tolerate company. It doesn't pay ; it brings misfortune'."

He had seen a purpose in Paul's eye and question, and thus attempted to destroy it, starting down the steps to his canoe ; but the poet caught him and held him, looking into his face with a fixed, earnest look, not without a suspicion of wildness.

"I must go with you," he said, "for I know you now. Florian often spoke of you. In old times those sick of the world came to men like you for help and consolation. I am sick of it. You must take me with you. You will bear half my troubles."

"You're a little crazy," said Scott. "I have nothing to do with your kind." And he laughed at the man's feeble grip.

"Nothing?" repeated Paul, following him to the canoe. "You have nothing to do with such as I? Why it was just such a sorrow as mine, perhaps, which drove you to this solitude. Let me be your disciple. We are alike in many ways."

The hermit looked at him again sharply.

"Are you in earnest?" he said coldly. "If so, come. Put in practice the first rule of this place—silence."

Wordless the poet entered the canoe, and the prow was turned toward Eel Bay.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A PROPOSAL.

FLORIAN had almost made up his mind to marry, after the failure to connect him with the Russian nobility, and was saved from precipitate action only by the fact that Frances and her mother were in the mountains for the summer. The great house was lonely at this moment. He missed Frances exceedingly, for in the private reception room she usually sat at twilight hour, and her music was the first thing he heard on entering the house, her form in its light drapery gleaming through the darkness the first he saw, and he found it pleasant and restful to sit listening to the sweet melodies.

Unconsciously, almost, Frances had grown into his life since Ruth was lost to him. It would be very sweet always to have her waiting in the twilight for him in his own house; and she was so very good and beautiful, not very brilliant like Barbara, not so full of character as the strong-souled Ruth, but perfect in her way, and made to reign over a household. He was not at all certain of winning her, but if the attempt were to be made he was determined to do his best, as he always did. It occurred to him to consult Mrs. Merrion. Women know one another thoroughly, and she was sharp-minded, generous,

and ever-willing in giving advice, and would be happy to help one of her warmest admirers. She was residing for the summer in a villa on the Jersey coast, whither the Count and himself often journeyed to dine, as it was but an hour's ride from New York. It had surprised the gentlemen that she should choose so quiet a spot instead of following the fashionable crowd.

"Well, I am in a mood," said Mrs. Merrion, "a serious mood, and I am going there to read, to think, to listen to the sea roaring, and to enjoy the moonlight nights alone."

"She must have some exquisite plot hatching," was the Count's comment ; but Florian, who thought he understood her better, saw no reason to doubt the plain meaning of her words. There was time to catch the noon boat and return late the same evening, and he hurried away at once to the seaside town, only to find Mrs. Merrion unexpectedly absent. She had promised never to be away from home when the boats arrived. Neither did the servant know whither she had gone, and he was left to walk the verandas impatiently and to stray through the rooms, one of which perhaps it was intended he should not have seen. It was a mere closet, holding a desk, a chair, and a prie-dieu, some pictures, books, and statues. But the character of its furniture almost took the breath away from the honorable gentleman. On the desk lay a few manuscripts, and an open book beside them suggested copying. The book was the *Imitation of Christ*. At the back of the desk hung a crucifix ; the pictures were of pious character, and one was a copy of a miraculous picture ; the books

were either controversial or works of pure Catholic devotion. As he recollected that these things were not intended for his eyes, he withdrew hastily to the outer air.

What new freak was Mrs. Merriion meditating? Was this the quiet and seclusion she had spoken of? Where had she gotten these ideas? He had never spoken to her on religious matters, and he was unaware of any Catholic acquaintances who would lead her to such thoughts and doings. Evidently this freak would spoil Mrs. Merriion without doing her any good, and he thought, with a jealous pang, how much this incident resembled Ruth's conversion. He had been her nearest friend, yet was unable to make any religious impression upon her, when a strange poet comes along, speaks a few words, and forthwith she is all tears. Who could the stranger be in this instance? While he was discussing the point Mrs. Merriion returned, her cheeks very red after a lively walk, and with many meek apologies for her delay. He looked at her curiously and remarked the change which had almost imperceptibly come upon her. Formerly she would have thrown the blame of her own delay on his shoulders, and maintained her position with saucy defiance of truth, reason, and politeness. Now she was a meek, quiet culprit, waiting a well-deserved sentence. It was really painful, and he told her so immediately.

"I suppose it's the sea air," she said, with a touch of the old archness; "it makes everything damp and clinging. You can hardly stand up when the wind is full of salt."

"But the wind is blowing off the land now," said

he. "It pains me to see you so changed. I hope you are not ill."

"What nonsense!" she cried; "you have been coming and coming all the summer, and never noticed it before. Why should you notice it now? I am happy enough, and one should be different at the seaside from what one is in the city. Wait until I resume my position in society—if I ever do——"

"Oh! 'if I ever do!'" repeated Florian, in mock amazement.

"Well, well. Ruth Pendleton went into a convent and you were not surprised. Why should not I do the same?"

"Oh! by all means. You are just suited for it."

"Have you any news from the city?" she said.

"Yes; I am going to be married."

She turned upon him a pair of wide, startled eyes, and unseen by him a faint pallor crept about her trembling lips.

"Well," said he, delighted, "other people are married; why should not I be?"

She did not speak at once, but turned to the window and looked over the plunging sea.

"It is hard to know which sex can do the stranger things," she said; "they seem to vie with each other."

"In foolishness, you mean. However, I have not dreamed of a monastery yet. I am waiting to hear your question about the lady, but you seem to have forgotten your natural curiosity. To tell the truth, I hardly know who she is myself.

"No? Have you fallen in love with an ideal?"

"I have not fallen in love at all. I am to marry

as a political necessity. I shall marry a woman I care for of course, and who cares for me——”

“It is not essential in a political marriage,” she said, with sly sarcasm, then took a look at his stolid, darkening face from under her gypsy hat.

“I know that, but I came to ask for your advice. I am in doubts as to the wisdom of asking a certain lady to be my wife—I shall demand so much of her in return for my own condescension. I would not wish to embitter her life by making demands which she could not supply. You can tell me whether she is capable of sustaining the burden of becoming Mrs. Wallace. You know Miss Lynch?”

“De Ponsonby’s daughter? Oh!--quite well; and she is of your own religious belief, too, which is an advantage.”

“Perhaps it draws me towards her out of many indifferent fair ones, and she is very beautiful.”

“And very good, I know—pious as an angel, without losing a woman’s vivacity or interest in worldly matters.”

“Her piety I consider a drawback. Women are not like men in these matters. If moved at all they are carried too far, and they mount a mere ceremonial observance and call it standing on principle. Such women are dangerous.”

“Very true. But Frances Lynch will not be dangerous unless you come within reach of her claws. Nature always provides its weak children with ugly means of defense, and the weaker the animal, the uglier its weapon. Then, you know, woman has a tongue, but that is nothing.”

“Oh! yes, it’s a great deal. But I came to you

for advice. Do you think she is the woman? make my doubts certainties, like the good fairy you are and always have been."

"If I do I shall ask a service at your hands," she answered softly. "Well, my advice is, follow your heart first——"

"I did follow it once," he interrupted, "and you know how it ended. I shall not try it again."

Florian was in despair. These manners were not Mrs. Merrion's, and while they became her, as everything did, they did not please him so well as the ordinary sauciness and defiance. If the oratory was the cause of it he would like to abolish it. She waited for some time after her last words before speaking. "I have something to show you," she said reluctantly. He knew it was the oratory and she led the way there. He was now at liberty to express his surprise, while she stood blushing.

"I see it all," he said: "this is the meaning of your desertion of the fashionable world, of your loss of old time cheerfulness and your increase of melancholy. Who would have believed it?"

"You seem to pay great attention to my moods."

"If you are to pay attention to women you must watch their moods, for their moods are themselves. I don't like to believe that this summer's mood is you. Perhaps it will pass before winter."

"Oh! I hope not, I hope not," she said earnestly. "Would you not wish me to become a Catholic?"

"It is natural, I suppose, to wish it. But it does not suit every soul to get the faith. I hope it will not do you any more damage. I would like to be of service to you and to advise you. The first thing

I advise is, don't enter a convent. It's the worst possible place for a convert."

"I will not if you say so," she answered mildly, and, the bell ringing for tea, they changed the conversation. It was pleasant to Florian how much at ease he felt with Mrs. Merrion, and he thought with some regret of the change his marriage and her conversion would cause in their relations. Barbara persisted in her religious mood far into the winter, and charmed her special circle with the new and picturesque lights religious melancholy shed upon her character. Florian was constantly at her side, and was as constantly putting off that interview with Frances, which Peter Carter dreaded and the society world was daily expecting. Strange thoughts were surging through him, passionate, impossible schemes that ended as they began—in nothing. Vladimir opened his eyes for him. The Count was charmed with Barbara's religious whim, and often rallied Florian as its inspirer.

"Nature and Fate have both favored you," said Vladimir one day with an envious look upon his friend.

"Mrs. Merrion adores you, esteems you. You are indeed a lucky fellow to stand so high in her favor, and at the same time to be adored by De Ponsonby's fair daughter. I wish you would choose between them quickly, and give me an opportunity in either place."

"Your special line of action," said Florian, flushing in spite of himself, "is not apt to be encouraged in those quarters. You are not in Paris."

"I know that, but women are women the world over. While you stand in my light I acknowledge I



can do nothing ; but give me a clear field, remove your Jupitership to one side or the other and see if Mercury is not as good a thief as ever. Why do you dally so much ? If you are in doubt take my advice and choose Barbara. The divorce court is not pleasant, but it will do if you work quickly and quietly."

"The divorce court!" cried Florian. "That sounds queerly from you, who are a Catholic, by tradition at least."

"I am speaking to a politician," the Count answered, "in whose path no difficulties are allowed to stand where his ambitions are concerned. All your good genii urge you to choose Barbara. You have thought of divorce yourself many a time."

Florian did not attempt to deny the assertion, only saying: "You are taking too much for granted, Count. I cannot see any weighty reasons for such a step."

"No?" The tone was slightly ironical. "First of all, this charming woman appreciates you. Secondly, she has become a Catholic. Do you desire the thirdly, etc. ?—for it exists although you cannot see it."

"Thank you, no," said Florian, hardly able to conceal his agitation. "You have a Parisian fancy, Count. You will not be understood or appreciated in this country for many a year."

"These are the days of primeval innocence," sneered the Count, "and the republic has usurped the virtue of the world. Well, wear your mask, Florian, but when you choose to throw it off let me know. I can lose no time where I have already lost so much."

During the next few days Florian loitered long in Frances' company, eager yet dreading to pluck the flower which grew so near his hand. He had not proposed to her as he had said he would, he could not bring himself to do it. What if circumstances should change the state of affairs? *What if some one should die?* He shuddered at the direction his thoughts were taking, and determined to end the uncertainty by an immediate proposal. Frances was passing his room one afternoon, and, hearing her light step, he called to her cheerfully to enter. He had fought his last battle with self a few minutes previous, standing before the pure pensive face which hung over the bookcase, and he had turned it to the wall with the intention of removing it forever from his aching gaze when he had won from his new love her promise to share life's joys and trials with him.

"I wished to show you this picture," he said, as Frances came timidly to him. "I am going to put it away forever."

She smiled inquiringly, and trembled in secret.

"You know its story," he went on; "every one knows it since Mr. Carter first heard it from Squire Pendleton."

"I have heard it," replied Frances, scarcely trusting herself to speak. "Mr. Carter was very earnest about it, and persisted in telling it more than once."

"Precisely. You did not know Ruth Pendleton?"

"I just met her for a moment. She seemed to be a very sweet girl, and I was glad to hear she became a Catholic."

"Yes," assented Florian; "I suppose it was for her good."

"Will you excuse me?" said she, with a blush which betrayed her fears.

"I shall detain you so short a time," he interrupted boldly. "I wish you to know the truth of this affair—it was such a garbled story which you heard. Do you not think her face a very strong as well as handsome one? Would you blame a man for loving its owner very deeply?"

"She was so good!" Frances answered nervously. "I thought more of that than her face."

"She was good, poor Ruth! We grew up together from childhood, and I knew her goodness of heart so well, and had loved her even as a boy. It was no surprise that when we had grown up I should have asked her to marry me. She accepted me and but for the difference of religion we would have been married these many years."

"And now that she is a Catholic?"

"Now that she is a Catholic," he said sadly, "we are farther apart than ever. The old love is dead; but we are very good friends," he added, without a trace of bitterness. "Ruth is so much my friend yet that she wishes I would get a good woman for my wife. I am trying to do so. Tell me, Miss Frances, am I deserving of a good one?"

"If you are not," she replied, 'rembling, "who can be?"

"That is your natural kindliness of heart speaking. But how many women would care for a man whose heart was once given to another?"

"You have it back again," she said with unconscious irony.

"But not sound and whole. The first love broke

it, and the second love may find it hard to accept second-hand furniture."

"Your comparison is too literal," she replied. He turned the picture once more to the wall.

"It shall never look this way again," he said, "until my wife turns it with her own hands. I am in love once more, and the woman I love is you."

The hot blood surged to her face and back again to her heart. He took her hand in his with tender respect.

"I have hopes," he continued, "that my love is returned. May I hope?"

She burst into tears and hid her face in her hands. He let the storm wear itself out before he spoke again, and a very sweet face she turned to him when he began to assure her of his love.

"I know it," she said faintly. "Do not tell me. I return it all."

"I need not tell you," he said, "what a responsible position you are taking. You have now on your hands an ambitious, hard-working man. How will so gentle a being manage me?"

"You are so willing to be managed: and that is the secret of every woman's control over a man."

"Ah!" said he, with a smile and a sigh, "but not always."

"You can manage yourself during the 'not always,'" she replied.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MRS. WINIFRED'S CONFESSION.

FAR away from the clatter of the town, in a deep enclosure of trees stood the convent where Ruth was passing the quiet days of her novitiate. The doubt and distress had long been ended, and faith had found a resting-place in her soul. The mournful past lay behind her, a picture with faded outline, and all those incidents and personages which had made up the circumstances of her life seemed no more than the remembrances of a troubled sleep. Everything about the convent life was so real. Where passions lay dead or asleep there were no heartbreakings. Every voice was soft and low, every sound was music; the cheerful stillness which hung over the place consecrated anew the sacred dwelling. It was a spot where a soul came to know itself quickly. So far away now seemed the world that she took with ease the resolution to retire from its turmoil forever.

One person Ruth could not forget. Paul Rossiter had so closely identified himself with her conversion that every thanksgiving besought a benediction for him, and no face looked out more strongly than his from the misty past. As the months passed, Ruth found her gratitude to the poet taking a deeper hold on her heart. Self began to fall away by degrees

under the friction of daily prayer and mortification. Her enthusiasms began to diminish in number and intensity. The first hot fervors of the convert died away into a healthier and more sustained emotion, and with this new feeling came the first intimations that God had not called her to the spiritual life of a convent. She was in love with her convent, there was no attraction in the world for her; marriage she never thought of, her literary tastes could be more easily gratified where she was; yet into her spirit, day by day, farther and farther intruded itself the conviction that she was not appointed to this life. It cost her many tears before she opened her mind on the subject to her confessor. He listened to her story with interest and was a long time in coming to his decision. When he did give one it was imperative and final. She must go home and find her vocation there. Very sadly, and yet with some relief, she laid the case before the superior.

"I am not surprised," said that lady, to Ruth's great astonishment, "not so much as you were. Have you ever heard anything about your friend, Mr. Rossiter?"

"No, I have not. I shall meet him some time probably, if he is living. I can never forget him."

"And are you absolutely determined to go into the world? Remember it is quite possible that after you are outside your spirit may change as powerfully as it has on this occasion."

"I must take the risk. I am not going to a bed of roses, and I am leaving one. But what can I do? Some restless spirit has taken possession and will not be exorcised until I am gone hence."

"Why not go off as a novice with permission, remain in the world until your mind is settled, and then return if it seems wise."

"It is kind of you to suggest that," said Ruth slowly, "and I will think of it."

"I may as well tell you," began the superior suavely, "I had a visit from Mr. Rossiter during the spring to inquire about you."

"Oh!" cried Ruth with parted lips and amazed eyes.

"He sent you his regards. I was very glad to meet him, after all you had told me concerning him. He seemed to be ill, or going into an illness."

Ruth grew pale and nervous.

"I think Mr. Rossiter must have a high respect for you. He loitered a long time about the grounds after his visit here and indulged in some drawing and writing. One of the sisters found a specimen of his work and brought it to me. I have preserved it for this occasion. I would have told you of this long since had I thought it would have been for your good. It is for your good to know it now."

She handed a package to speechless Ruth and dismissed her. The novice took it to her room and opened it in feverish haste. What connection could she have with Paul Rossiter's writings and sketches? It was the bit of bristol-board on which he had scribbled the day of his visit to the convent. Ruth read and studied it with flushed face and moistened eye, and into her heart slipped the first spark of love to light anew the flame which gratitude had once lighted there. As much as her vocation had been a matter of doubt before, so much of a certainty it now be-

came. She left the religious life absolutely and forever, though with many tears, and presented herself one sunny afternoon before Barbara Merrion in Brooklyn.

"Why, what in the name of everything uncommon and wonderful," cried Barbara, "brings you here, Ruth Pendleton?" And an angry light shot into her eyes.

"I am too tired to say anything now," said Ruth; "but when I have rested you can give me your opinion on that." And she handed her the bit of bristol-board. Barbara examined it critically, and a happy smile touched her face when she caught its full import.

"What a happy destiny which threw this in your way," said she, "before you were bound to the nun's life irrevocably!"

"I had resolved long before to leave the convent," Ruth replied. Barbara did not believe the assertion.

"We had arranged a match for you and Paul long ago," Barbara said, laughing, "and I assure you we were bitterly disappointed when our plans failed. The poet is not here now, and no one can tell where he is."

"Florian must know," said Ruth confidently.

"Oh! dear no. They had a quarrel of some kind after you left, and have never since been intimate. Early in the spring Mr. Rossiter left his quarters and has not since been heard of."

"Not been heard of?" Ruth murmured tremulously.

"Were you aware that about the poet's departure there was a mystery, that he was ill and poor and



wretched when he went away, that Madame Lynch dismissed him because of a false story of Peter Carter's, that he left the house secretly, and that there is a suspicion of—shall I say it?"

"Suicide," said Ruth calmly, though her face was pale. "You may say it, but I do not, could not, believe it of him."

"Nor I," Barbara added with emphasis; "but the poor fellow left in a sad plight and where he went no man knows."

"He was at my convent in the spring, and went northward, but how far or in what direction was not known."

"A little money will discover him. Now go to bed for a few hours, and when you come down I shall acquaint you with the news of two hemispheres—some of it interesting, I assure you."

Ruth obeyed. When she sought Mrs. Merrion later in the day the vivacious sprite was carrying in both hands her manual of prayer as she walked tirelessly through the long hall.

"You are piously engaged," said Ruth, smiling at the unusual sight.

"I must be, having an ex-nun here," replied Barbara, smartly; "and then I am making preparations for my baptism."

"For your baptism?" repressing an inclination to laugh. "Are you going over to the Baptists?"

"No, to the Catholics," and her eyes fell. Ruth stood for a moment transfixed and actually suspicious.

"I congratulate you," she said at length, but there

was little warmth in her good wishes. "When did this happiness come to you?"

"So long ago that I scarcely remember. It was not sudden. It grew within me. But let us talk of something more to your taste. Converts are suspicious of one another. You have heard, perhaps, that Florian is soon to be married."

"I have heard none of these things, but I supposed it would take place some time. Who is the happy lady?"

"You remember that Frances Lynch who——"

"What a good choice he has made!" Ruth exclaimed in delight. "I hardly expected it from Florian. It will save him—surely it will save him."

"Save him from what?" said Barbara sharply, and crossly too.

"From himself and the temptations which surround him in his position. Florian needs a check of some kind. I think him apt to fly beyond limits."

"You would make a Puritan of him. I think he was fortunate in missing you."

"It was fortunate for us both," Ruth answered, and dismissed the subject with a sigh. Barbara sat watching her secretly. She had improved very much during her absence, and the pale, spiritual light which shone about her face rendered its natural beauty more remarkable. The old aggressive firmness seemed gone from her manner, the old determination had found a different way of expressing itself; and, sweet and gentle as Ruth had ever been, these qualities were now intensified.

"If she beckoned Florian to her now," thought

Barbara, with some bitterness, "an army of *me's* and Franceses would not keep him from her."

Inquiries for the poet resulted only in the discovery that not one of his friends knew anything of his present abode; then Barbara began to grow irritable, and Ruth fled homeward without visiting Florian.

"And so Ruth Pendleton is back!" was the cry in Clayburgh two days after a tired and disappointed woman left the train at the station, and, unrecognized by her friends, walked in the direction of the Squire's now lonely mansion. Yes, Ruth was back to the old scenes, a much sadder and much happier woman than when she left them; and if the tears filled her eyes at sight of the familiar objects, and a great pain pierced her heart, it was not more than the protest which nature makes against change. Coming home at a late hour that night, Pendleton felt his heart give a thump as he saw lights in the unused parlor windows and heard the tinkling of the long closed piano.

"It's Ruth," said he, stopping to catch his breath and rid himself of a fit of trembling. "It's Ruth come back again for good," and he held out his arms to her.

"I've come back for good," she whispered, as he threw his arms about her. "I shall never leave you again, father."

And they both believed it; for it had been a pet theory of the Squire's that if Ruth again returned it would be never to leave him, and in her hopelessness at that moment she felt a premonition that her stay in Clayburgh was to be permanent.

"And where did you come from?" said the Squire.

"From New York; and I have some astonishing news for you. Barbara Merrion has become a Catholic, and Florian is going——"

"Hold on!" said the Squire, with a gasp, and maybe an oath. "Barbara become a Catholic! Ruth, you'll have to don your old clothes. It isn't a religion for any one when she's in it."

"She is very much changed," said Ruth, in a tone that seemed to approve of the Squire's sentiments. "You would not know her."

"H'm!" grunted Pendleton. "I'd know her if she put on the Pope's own rig. She's Barbbery all the same. I'll wager any sum that she's up to some of her devilish tricks. She hasn't got her eye on Florian now, has she? It would be easy enough to give old Merrion the slip, and she'd coax an angel into sin, I swear."

"Florian is engaged to Frances Lynch."

"O Jer-rusalem!" said the Squire, with a mighty roar of pain. "Then it's all over, Ruth—it's all over." And in an instant the tears were falling in a shower and a few sobs shook him fiercely. He had never given up his hope that Florian and Ruth would yet be reconciled.

"It was all over years ago," Ruth replied, gently. "I did not think you expected it still, father."

"And I had no right to," said the Squire, striding impatiently down the room. "You never held out a hope, though Florian thinks just as much of you to-day as he did ten years ago. Let it pass. I'm always making a fool of myself. Don't know when

I cried before. And so Barbery is a papist, hey? I wonder how long she'll remain one? And Florian's done it at last! Well, he's got a mighty nice girl, but it won't please Peter Carter much."

"What about Mr. Carter?" she asked.

"Oh! you knew him—the greatest fool that ever lived; and I dunno," added the Squire dubiously, "but that I was a greater fool, for I actually thought that man a genius. He had an idea that Flory was no match for that Lynch girl, and was anxious to help me in matching you and Flory. He did, but he helped me the wrong way. I'm inclined to invite him up here this summer, and let him make an ass of himself through the town."

"It would not be becoming," said she; "he is too—too——"

"Too much of a talker," supplemented her father. "Yes, he gives one away every five minutes when a secret is entrusted to him. Oh! no; I'll not invite him to this house. Well, Ruth, you're back, and I am consoled for all my waiting. I'll have to stand a pile of chaff, though, from the boys when they see you going up to the Catholic Church. How will you stand the women though?"

"I am not afraid," said Ruth cheerfully, "for I am a sort of balance for Sara Wallace's defection."

"That's a good argument," said the Squire in delight. "I'm glad you mentioned it, for I'll give it to 'em first thing. I hope you're contented, Ruth, with your new clothes. Do they fit easy?"

"So contented!" said Ruth, with a happy smile. "And oh! if I could persuade you——"

"There, there!" he interrupted hastily. "It's all

right if you are happy, but don't try to rope me into any of these religions. They're good enough for the women, but they're beyond me. I thought more of Catholics, though, before Barbery joined them."

With a sigh Ruth relinquished the appeal which she had intended to make to him.

"I must warn you," continued the Squire, "that if you try to convert me I'll take to drink, upon my honor. I'll get too stupid to understand an argument. So just let up on ideas of that kind. Go to bed now, and sleep off convent notions."

During the next few days the greater portion of the town paid its respects to Ruth. Among her visitors were the worthy elders of the various congregations, curious to know by what process of reasoning this young lady had gone over to the enemy, and many were the amusing questions put to her. Her great defense was the perversion of Mrs. Buck and the right of private judgment. With these weapons she triumphed easily, and Clayburgh accepted the position with the easy-going, matter-of-fact slowness which is an inheritance from Manhattan ancestors and does not prevail in bitter, unforgiving New England. Mrs. Wallace had not called, much to Ruth's surprise, and at the first opportunity she went over to see her. Time had dealt hardly with the placid lady. The Mrs. Winifred who feebly grasped Ruth's hand was an insignificant shadow of the stout, timid lady of three years ago. She tried to smile and chat with the old-time manner, but had not breath enough for so large a word as "seemingly," and Ruth sorrowfully recognized the fact that Mrs. Winifred's days were numbered. Her

chief anxiety was for Florian. Florian was the theme of every conversation, and her chief anxiety was whether her boy was uneasy in mind and haunted by any apprehensions.

"Because if he is," she said to Ruth, "I can help him, and I will in spite of every one."

It was the most determined expression Mrs. Winifred had ever been known to use, and only her extreme weakness accounted for and excused it.

"I shall not last much longer," said Mrs. Winifred, after a few moments of silence. "I wish it had ended long ago. But no matter, Ruth, let me tell you something; this trouble is all about Florian and Linda and I feel it here," laying her hand on her breast, "gnawing always. In a few days I shall send for you, maybe, to do me a favor. You will come, won't you? Promise me, Ruth."

"Oh! certainly," said Ruth assuringly, for the sick woman began to get dangerously eager.

"Ah! but you must promise, dear," she cried, catching Ruth's dress with feverish hands. "Seemingly, you must promise that you will come, no matter what stands in the way."

"I promise," answered Ruth.

After scanning her features for awhile in an invalid's pitiful way, she lay back satisfied.

"What do you think of her?" said Billy when next he met her.

"What can you think of a dying woman? You will not have her long. Why not send for Florian? She is always speaking of him."

"The Père wouldn't hear of it," said Billy, tremulously. "No, no, he wouldn't hear of it. I couldn't

permit it. It was that Russian, the devil! that did it all. Ever since he came here we got no good of her. It's awful!"

Ruth wondered at the Père's interference in the matter, but said nothing, as she wished to speak to the priest later.

"It seems reasonable," she remarked to her father, "that if the poor woman wishes to see her son she ought to see him."

"Why, of course," shouted Pendleton, "and so she shall. I'll send for him—no, I'll go for him myself."

"And do all sorts of harm," Ruth interposed. "No, no, father; but you might find out from Billy what his reason is for not informing Florian of his mother's condition. Then we would the better know what to do."

"Jes' so," said the Squire, with a blush for his own stupidity.

"And to-morrow," said Ruth, "you must get out the boat and take me over to the islands. I have not seen the hermit since my return."

"There isn't much about him to see," said her father in disgusted tones. "He's had a doctor running over there for some time seeing to a patient who lives with him or near him, and not one of us can find out who the sick man is."

"Trust a woman to do that," said Ruth. "I shall know what is to be known about him by this time to-morrow night."

Since the day she had bidden him good-bye in the cabin previous to her departure for New York she had not set eyes on Scott, and she was curious to



learn what changes time had made in his looks, habits, and opinions. They went over the next day, and were a long time getting to their destination owing to scanty wind ; but the scenes, the old scenes were so very beautiful that Ruth could have lingered even longer among them. A soft haze rested like a veil on distant objects, and the river was dotted with the boats of fishing-parties, whose songs and merry-making floated pleasantly to the ear. Every spot was a memory to Ruth, and Linda's bright face seemed ready to peep coquettishly from behind rock and tree. They came to anchor opposite the well-known boulder, and Ruth, leaping ashore, ran eagerly up to the house and knocked smartly. She heard the sound of voices in the room within, but only the hermit met her at the door. He had *Izaak Walton* in his hand and a cold look on his face, but she offered both hands so radiantly that he could not but smile at her delight and shake them gingerly.

"You are welcome back," said he gravely. "You've come to a safe harbor, and I hope you'll stay in it."

"You may be certain that I will," she answered in a low voice.

Scott led the way into the house—the same old house, unchanged even to the patches on the bed-quilt. Ruth's tears began suddenly to flow as she stood looking at the only perishable spot about her which had a seeming of immortality. There it stood, not one iota different from the room in which Florian and Scott and she had discussed measures for the Squire's safety nearly a decade of years past.

"I always thought it the gate of heaven," she

said, smiling through her tears, "but now I am sure of it."

"It makes little difference to some people what gate it is," he replied. "They wouldn't take advantage of it anyhow."

"The nearer you get the harder to get on," said Ruth; "and the gate is the worst part of the road."

His eyes flashed an instant's surprise and admiration.

"You've learned something since you were here last," he deigned to say.

"Learned something?" retorted the Squire, laboring to keep his oar in the conversation. "Why, man, do you think a woman goes backward as she gets older? Men advance, why not she?"

"I didn't say that men advance," replied Scott, "or that women didn't. Flory used to say that woman was the only creature which learned nothing from experience."

"Right he was, too. When Flory said a thing he hit the nail on the head every time."

"You saw him lately, perhaps?" said the hermit to Ruth.

"Yes, and he was very proud and happy in the possession of a young lady whom he is soon to call his wife."

"Ah!" said Scott indifferently.

"But his mother is so ill," Ruth went on; "and the family do not seem to think of sending for him. She is always speaking of him."

"These great statesmen," said Scott, "are not always willin' to give up their time to sick people."

He must have consid'able work on his hands besides."

"You have not asked me yet," said Ruth, "about my experiences since I left. They have been very new I assure you."

"I know them all," Scott replied briefly.

"And you take no credit to yourself for that fulfillment of your prophecies?"

"They might never have been fulfilled, an' they weren't prophecies. I guessed what might have happened, an' it did—that's all."

Ruth was disappointed. Scott's ordinary brusqueness seemed to have taken a more gloomy shade, and the sarcastic, rough philosophy of his speech to have given way to a matter-of-fact plainness. They talked on in an aimless way for a half hour longer, and then took their leave dissatisfied, without having discovered any trace of the stranger who was supposed to be living with the hermit. Ruth pressed his hand at parting, with the tears in her eyes.

"You are as human as the rest of us," she said. "You have changed, and not for the better."

He did not reply, and Ruth, as they sailed away, watched him sadly.

"Change, change, and nothing but change," she murmured. "I am getting old indeed. None but the old feel change. These differences in people hurt me."

Until the new life began to fit her shoulders she was weighed down with despondency. For a time it seemed hardly worth the trouble to live and fight the daily heartache and try to fill up the sense of loss which existed in her soul. Nursing feeble Mrs.

Winifred helped her to overcome these feelings. But as the lady grew weaker, and there was the same hesitation in sending for Florian, she began to feel indignant. Every day the mother called incessantly for her son. She did not ask to see him, but an increasing anxiety as to his personal safety was evident in her manner. Although it was thought she was delirious at times, Ruth perceived a hidden meaning in the apparently wild utterances. Ruth was about to send word to Florian when one day Mrs. Winifred called her and gave her the key of a cupboard in the room.

"Open that," she said, "and then follow my directions."

The cupboard contained on its dusty shelves a few old books and papers. At the back was a secret compartment neatly inserted and concealed in the plastering; and from this mysterious hiding-place Ruth drew out a metal box small enough to be carried in the pocket.

"Now get pen and paper," said Mrs. Winifred, with a new decision in her voice, "and write as I bid. Seemingly this can't last forever, and I'll not have Florian's blood on my hands."

Ruth sat down in awed silence and began to write the following confession. Several times she laid aside the pen in amazement, thinking Mrs. Winifred's senses had taken leave of her; but the lady smiled reassuringly and bade her continue:

"Florian Wallace and his sister Linda are not my children. Thirty years ago a stranger came with them to me and begged me to take care of them.

Their mother was dead, and he offered me a large sum if I would adopt them as my own and keep from them forever the secret of their parentage. I have done so up to this moment. Florian now stands in danger from secret enemies, and I make this confession for his benefit, that he may know how to meet them. His father resembled him closely, but that his hair was yellow and his eyes blue. He told me his story. He was from Russia, compelled to fly because of his religion. He wished that his children should never return to Russia, and urged me to rear them as my own. He had papers in his possession which he intended to destroy ; but I stole them from him and kept them to this day. What their value is I do not know. He left his children with me and went away. Some time ago a stranger, said to be a Russian, came to this town. I believe he was looking for the children. I know he will do harm to Florian, and I warn him. My husband can witness to the truth of this confession.

“WINIFRED WALLACE.”

“You will give that to Florian,” said she feebly, “and also the box. It was a great trouble to me, but now I feel better. You will have to be secret. There are some who think I have the papers, and would like to destroy them. Be careful, my dear—be careful.”

Exhausted by the effort she had made, Mrs. Winifred fell asleep, and Ruth was left to think over and realize this strange story. The metal box was easily opened. It was full of papers, legal documents most of them, composed in French, and all tending to show

that certain persons were nobles or princes of high rank in Russia. And so Linda, poor dear Linda, was perhaps a Russian princess, born to luxury and love, to move through storied halls in proud attire, to live among the great and mighty; and fate had given her instead a home and grave in an obscure American town. She could not picture to herself that dainty girl in any other form than the sweet, familiar one, nor fancy her a haughty lady of royal blood. And Florian was a prince! It was easy, indeed, to dream of him in such a position, who had ever been a prince among men; but she sighed as she recalled his present temper, and thought how little such an elevation would benefit him. His grasping ambition would now be increased and the field of wicked opportunities widened. While she sat and thought the sick woman opened her eyes again.

"Ruth, dear," she whispered, "you must carry the letter to New York yourself. I could not trust it in any other hands."

"No," replied Ruth; "but Florian shall come after it."

A look of joy passed over Mrs. Winifred's pale face.

"I would so like to see him again!" she said.

And Ruth posted with her own hands a letter to Florian, urging him in strange, mysterious language to lose no time in reaching Clayburgh. That night Mrs. Winifred died suddenly and alone. They found the poor woman, her beads clasped in her hands, quite cold. She would never look again on the boy to whom she had been so faithful and kind a mother.

## CHAPTER XIX.

BARBARA WINS.

THE chief mourner at the funeral was Mrs. Buck, to whom had been made known the curious fact that she was the only child of her parents. She wept copiously over both caskets. Florian seized upon his papers, and made vigorous attempts upon Billy and the priest to discover if his father were yet living. They knew nothing or would reveal nothing and he was compelled to give up the effort for a time, and learn what Billy could tell him in detached sentences of the first appearances of his father. It was meager information. However, with legal accuracy he jotted down dates and facts, and carried them home with him. He continued to keep his own counsel regarding late events and to study up a line of action. His was an eminently practical mind. He thought less of his title and his ancestry than of the gold they represented. The idea of donning his princely name and settling down in Russia entered his mind only to be ridiculed. He would not do such a thing even were it at all feasible; with assassination threatening it would be the highest folly. His chief difficulty was the mess of pottage. If he could get a half-million! It was a large sum—half of it was a large sum—but one serious circumstance threatened to diminish and perhaps destroy it. His

father was, perhaps, still living, and no plans that he could form safely bridged that difficulty. Prince Louis of Cracow would not risk his money on chance, nor would he himself care to act so freely with what was only presumptively his own.

After many days of weary thinking he came to no conclusion in regard to his manner of procedure with the Count. Florian did not care to tell him at once of his late discovery. If his father were alive it became necessary to produce him. If he were dead his death must be well proven before the Prince of Cracow would part with his gold to the prince's son. And Florian so needed the money that he could not think of the dread possibility of waiting for it another year. The convention of the next summer was to nominate a candidate for governor, and he was determined to try for the nomination; but he needed gold to soften his own party and to gild his religion out of sight. Here was his only chance to obtain it. Ambition's fever was eating him up, and his moral perceptions, long blunted, seemed losing their edge entirely. He allowed the autumn and winter to slip away without doing more than to set a very commonplace detective on his father's track. Nothing, of course, was discovered concerning him. His only confidant in business matters was Mrs. Merrion, whom he had not yet made aware of his change of fortune. He called on her one afternoon when twilight was drawing near and visitors and admirers were sure to be put aside. She had a new doubt of conscience for him to solve. Her conscience always troubled her now that she was a Catholic.



"Father Baretti told me to-day"—she affected foreign clergymen—"I had been speaking to him of some dear gentlemen friends of mine——"

"God help him," groaned Florian, "if he has to listen to the tales of women! I know a tithe of what his sufferings must be."

"But let me tell you——"

"No, no," he cried impatiently, "not a word. But let me tell you what I came to say. Would you take me for a Russian prince of royal blood?"

"I would take you for a czar," she said with enthusiasm.

"Well," said he, standing before her smilingly, "if you ask the Count he will tell you that he does not believe I am plain Florian Wallace. He will swear also that I am Prince Florian of Cracow, the heir to a noble title and estate, whom he has been commissioned to find in this country. For want of proof he has not been able to do it. But I have the proofs now. My supposed mother gave them to me on her death-bed, and I am at this moment truly the Prince Florian. Is it not a romance?"

She did not answer for a moment, but sat staring into his earnest face. His strange words carried conviction with them, but they caused her such astonishment and bitter disappointment that her first expression was a half-stifled sob.

He looked at her curiously. "I suppose," she began, "oh—I do not know what to say. I cannot congratulate you. Pray tell me all from the beginning."

He obeyed, and she listened with shining eyes.

"Oh! what a happy destiny," she cried; "what

a future for your wife! How we missed it that thought so little of you in Clayburgh! What a bitter punishment for us!"

"Ay, indeed," he sighed, "what a bitter punishment!"

"Ruth will be sorry enough now that she threw you aside."

"Not at all," said he moodily; "she it was who first heard the story and got me the proofs. There was not one whit of regret in her manner. If there had been——"

He growled the rest of the sentence to himself.

"If there had been," she continued maliciously and bitterly, "somebody would be left out in the cold."

A burning flush spread over his face.

"You see how I estimate you," she said archly, "and you cannot get offended at the truth."

"I have not the title yet. I am not going to Russia nor to wear my title. I am going to sell my right to it and remain in America."

"You are not going to wear your title! you are going to remain in America! That takes the romance from the story. I don't feel like helping any one that's so foolish as to do that."

"It is not so very foolish. I am to run for the governorship of this State, and, if I have money enough, I shall get the place. Which would you prefer, the governor or the prince?"

"The governor, by all means," said she promptly, seeing that such was his inclination.

"But my father, who has the first claim, may be living. I cannot sell while he is known to be

alive; and if he appears or does not appear, where am I?"

"Act as if he were dead. Probably he is, and will never disturb you."

He walked the room in thought. The twilight had deepened into darkness and the street-lamps outside were shining on the wintry night. Her advice had occurred to him already, but he did not like to whisper its dishonesty to himself.

"I will think about it," he said; "it's a nice point to decide."

"And naughty," said Barbara cheerfully; "but it is the only thing to do, and you ought to do it immediately, if you expect to have the money in time for the convention. You are attempting high flights, Florian."

"It will not be my last if it succeeds. If it does not I shall come down with a crippled wing."

"Prince Florian," said she, half to herself, "I fear me you will get the crippled wing. In some ways you have not the support you should have. Frances is too weak a woman for you."

"I know it," he said calmly, but his face had whitened suddenly and his hands were trembling. "But the one woman fitted to support me is beyond my reach."

"I am not so sure of that. Love and ambition laugh at many things. I know one woman who, if you would dare to take her in spite of many difficulties, would be willing to follow you into hovel or palace. But you are too fearful. You would not dare to do as she would dare."

"Perhaps not," he answered; and then, after a

pause, he said in a singularly quiet voice, "Name her, and I swear to you that if she be the woman I think her I shall dare anything."

Barbara very significantly gave him her hand.

Count Vladimir was honored next day with a visit from Florian, who carried a packet in his hands.

"Welcome, my dear friend," said the Count; "you are becoming a model fiancé. All your time is so exclusively devoted to Miss Lynch that you cannot spare an afternoon to your friends. It is well. Have all the skeletons of the closet laid bare for Madame's inspection, and there will be no dream of them after."

"Never mind those trifles, Count. I have here some serious business for you. I can now prove to you that I am the only son of the missing prince. Here are some new revelations."

Vladimir could not repress the exclamation of surprise that rose to his lips.

"My mother died in September," said Florian, "and made a confession. She also delivered to me these papers. Now please examine them and tell me what you think of my chances."

The Count read the documents slowly and carefully, with an expression of professional distrust on his handsome wearied face.

"They are very complete," said he, "and I congratulate you on your advancement. You are now a fit object for assassination."

"So I suppose; but as I emphatically decline to accept either the title or Russian citizenship, I hope that danger is averted."

"It would be," said the Count slowly, "if you

really mean that. But I cannot understand you to mean that you will not attempt——”

“I mean that precisely. I don’t want the title but I am in need of half a million. If my noble relative concludes to buy me off for that sum, he can remain forever unmolested.”

“My dear boy,” said the Count, delighted, “you relieve me. I shall never have the pain of seeing your stiffened body lying in the morgue. Instead I shall have the pleasure of handing you as much money as I can squeeze out of the prince. There is one little obstacle. There are no proofs of your father’s death, wherefore it is to be presumed that he is alive.”

“Do not let that trouble you. My father knows your Russian methods too well ever to bother you. It is I who will receive the trouble, and I am prepared for it. If he makes his appearance, depend on me to manage him. If I do not your noble employer will.”

“Is it so?” said the Count, with a peculiar smile. “Then consider the work done.”

“I would advise you,” said Florian, “to call in that agent of yours and dismiss him. It is impossible to say what harm he might do through the country, looking for the heir.”

“His work is ended. You need not fear him.”

“That I never did,” said Florian.

That very day he began to lay his plans to secure the nomination at the convention, and with the money which he had acquired, and the influence he had won, and his name rung to every change by the partisan newspapers, his prospects looked very fair. The

story of his life was published far and wide. When it became known that he had preferred his American citizenship to the proud birthright of a Russian prince, his popularity knew no bounds, and papers and people were never tired of calling him Prince Florian, and pointing to him as a bright example of American training methods. His religion was not mentioned. It was a question which his party never could handle with perfect freedom, and the opposition never disturbed it unless for campaign purposes. The convention nominated him for governor amid universal acclamation: and if the means employed to obtain this result were questionable, such as the free use of money and the glossing over of his religious tenets, they were not crimes and did not disturb the sweet serenity of his slowly toughened conscience. In all his life he had never experienced such a thrill of delight as swept through him on seeing his name at the head of the State ticket. It dazed him for an instant. He felt already under his hand the mighty throbbing of the great State whose destinies he was to guide for twenty-four months. He would give a world for one continuous draught of such a delight.

Frances alone was silent and reserved. She made no such demonstration as her mother did, and was ever looking at him with a vague alarm in her face. She received her share of public attention also, but it did not please her. He was sufficiently tender-hearted to feel ashamed in the presence of the pure young girl, and to wish to keep out of her way as much as possible. What was he to do with her, now that she was become a burden to him? It was a

question he did not like to face, for when he looked at it squarely it showed him so much in the light of a villain that the reflection was unpleasant. He had no conscience in the matter, but he had a spark of something which is called honor. During the course of the month he met the Count by appointment and received the first installment of his money.

"After this it will come rapidly," said Vladimir; "and my employer desires me to give the sincerest thanks to the young relative who concludes to accept the inevitable for so handsome a price. You are always welcome, so he says, at the ancestral hall."

"Much obliged, indeed. I shall be careful not to call, though, until the price is paid. If I died intestate the money would revert to the Prince. I can fancy he would like nothing better than an opportunity to get it back."

"Tell me," said Vladimir, as they were parting, "have you yet any notion of where your father might be?"

"What put that in your head?" with a quick, sharp look into the Count's yellow face. "I hope your bloodhound is not looking for him."

"We have nothing more to do with him," he said proudly. "It was mere curiosity that prompted the question."

Nevertheless the Count's curiosity awakened dormant considerations in Florian's mind, and he walked away ill at ease. His thoughts were turned forcibly into a channel which hitherto they had avoided. His father, if alive, was probably determined to die with his history a secret, yet his

existence was in some sort a menace to that relative who had purchased from Florian rights which were not actually his to sell. What if that relative had instituted a search for his father. And what if he should be found by that Nicholas whose murderous profession declared itself in his face? Florian shuddered and put the thought from him as too awful for probability; but it seemed so fitting a climax for the defections of which he had been guilty that again and again through that day and night he trembled with apprehension. His faithlessness to Frances, his bad dispositions and political heresies, loomed up before him like gigantic clouds from whose bosom threatened to leap the thunderbolt of crime. He was urged thereby to renew more actively his search for his father, and to have Nicholas shadowed. Under these precautions his mind found temporary rest, but occasionally the first thought presented itself like a specter and wrung his soul most cruelly.

Barbara, on his next visit, was absent in Buffalo, but she had left a note for him enclosing a telegram. Its information was stupefying but welcome. Mr. Merriam had died suddenly in a Buffalo hotel, and his widow had gone to bring the body home. Fate clearly was helping him in his downward course. There remained between him and happiness but one obstacle—the fall elections. He had a sublime American faith in the power of gold, and was determined to spend his last cent in convincing the people of the harmlessness of his faith in American politics.

The most effective attacks which were made on Florian during the campaign came from an anony-



mous writer in letters descriptive of his personal character. They could have been written by no other than a person well acquainted with him. The letters verged on brilliancy, and gave a fair account of Florian's rise and gradual change of opinions, with the views which orthodox Catholics held concerning him. Florian read them with feelings of indignation. There was a traitor in the camp, and he thought seriously of libel suits, until the failure of the letters to appear quieted him. He received his first hint as to their possible author from Barbara. She was certain Peter Carter wrote them. She could see his natural manner in every line; and sure enough, after critical examination many evidences of the man appeared in them. When Florian had made complaint to madame, and she had accused Peter of abusing her hospitality, he admitted the charge cheerfully.

"I've been waitin' this many a year to put him down to the public for what he is," said Peter, with the usual flourish, "and I'm doin' it. Those letters aren't half of it, either."

Madame glared at him in a dangerous way.

"You may look, mother-in-law," said he jauntily, "but the days of looks are over. Ye are going to marry Frances, in spite of all my remonstrances, to a man that's fit for nothing better than the Brooklyn freelance. I told ye I'd never permit it. I tell ye so again."

Frances was present at this tirade, and felt, without knowing its cause, a deadly sickness of heart. She looked at her mother inquiringly, and it drove madame into a passion.

"You need not repeat your threats to me," she said, "but go and execute them."

"That I will shortly, an' ye can get ready for it. Ye're a queer mother to allow such a man to be connected with your daughter—a man that would give the whole of her for Barbara Merrion's little finger, an' will be apt to do it before long, now she's a widow. Anyhow, I'll do it for him——"

"How dare you," cried Frances, starting to her feet, pale with rage—"how dare you talk so of a gentleman? O mamma! why do you permit it?"

"How dare I?" snapped Peter pitilessly. "What daren't I do? An' he's a gentleman, is he? Oh! he's a gentleman of the new school, I suppose. But I'll teach him; an' if you don't give him up of your own accord, you will of mine."

Frances burst into sobs and ran out of the room, which sobered Peter. "From this moment," said madame frigidly, although she was terribly excited, "our relations cease. You must leave this house forever, and one penny of your allowance you will never again receive."

"What a joke! But the day of jokes is over, too. I'll not leave the house, an', by hook or crook, I'll have my allowance to the last."

"Go, go!" cried madame, trembling. "Do not urge me to have you forcibly removed."

Florian was sitting one evening in madame's private parlor. Frances was engaged with her needlework, and her mother was nodding over the pages of a magazine, when Peter unceremoniously entered. One glance at his face would show that he had come on a desperate errand. It was purple from

suppressed feeling, and his eyes were averted. He made a great fuss over shutting the door. Madame sat pale and apprehensive, yet with the calmness of a courageous despair. Frances, seeing her mother's expression, grew nervous, and Florian shaded his pallid face with his trembling hand. Peter, coughing and strutting, stood before him.

"I have a story to tell you," said he in tones too unsteady for coughing to render firm, "and I like you to listen."

Florian bowed in a cold assent. One of Peter's peculiarities of speech was that in moments of excitement he lost much of his brogue.

"Ye are engaged to marry this girl here," continued Peter. "Well, I forbid the banns—at em!—that is, the thing can't go on without my approval, which I won't give. *I am her father!*"

Naturally, after this astounding revelation, there was an awesome silence, broken only by a sob from Frances, upon whom the truth of his last declaration fell crushingly.

"There!" snapped Peter, turning angrily on his wife, "there's your training. She's ashamed of her father."

"She must thank her father for the feeling," said madame, greatly relieved at the bursting of the storm and apprehensive only of losing Florian for a son-in-law.

"Just so," said Peter thoughtfully. "You see and understand, Mr. Wallace, why I've so often threatened you about this marriage. You see, I know as well as you do that the coming governor of this State, and perhaps the next president, can have

nothing to do with the daughter of the scribbler, the dead-beat, the broken-down gentleman. I'm sorry I didn't tell of it before, an' so prevent any unpleasantness. But my daughter is sensible, if her mother *has* misled her a little. She'll give you back your freedom, an' for her sake you'll pardon the mother who deceived you into an alliance not at all creditable to one of your blood and position, even if you made it willingly."

Proud of his speech and his diplomacy, Peter strutted across the room. He had effectually silenced madame. Frances was struggling with her agony, and there was another silence until Florian, shame-faced and awkward, spoke:

"This is—a—very peculiar—a—accident. I regret extremely that I had not known it sooner. If you will permit me I shall retire to consider——"

"Of course," said Peter briskly, "but not till Frances has shown the proper spirit of the Desmonds. She's not ashamed of her father, sir, the direct descendant of a noble Irish house, and will release you willingly. Stan' up, girl, and throw him back his pledges—that is, Frank, he couldn't marry you, you know, and your father such a villain."

"You are free, Mr. Wallace," said she.

"Bravo!" shouted Peter to supplement her weakness, for Frances was panting with the effort. "Spoken like a Desmond's own daughter."

"My dear child," said madame, "you wrong Florian——"

"Not another word!" cried Peter; "you've wronged him enough already, and can't you see by

his face he's crazy to be rid of us? Don't dare to play mother-in-law any more."

"You are entirely free, Mr. Wallace," said Frances again and more calmly. "Under no circumstances could I now think of a marriage with you. Please do not add to the painfulness of this scene by speaking, but go at once."

His pride would not let him depart so meanly, and coming over to her side, he tried vainly to take her hand. "Believe me," said he feebly, "no one more sincerely regrets these circumstances than I do. You will always have my highest esteem, and unless you bid me go I shall never leave your side."

Madame would have strengthened this offer with her own influence but for Peter's silent threat to demolish her if she said a word.

"Oh! go, sir, go!" cried Frances hardly able to repress the anguish of her heart, which this hollow speech increased tenfold. He went out of the room rejoicing and flew to Barbara.

"There goes the greatest villain this side of the Atlantic," said Peter, half-triumphant, half-disgusted. "A Russian prince, forsooth! A gentleman, an American gentleman, bedad. D'ye mind, Frances, how ready he was to give ye up? He is gone straight to Widow Merrion, now, to tell her the whole story and get her ready for marrying him. I'm sorry I let him off so easy. He ought to be made pay for it, and, if it was only to spite him, I'd like to see you married to him. I'll make him pay for it yet."

"You had better," said madame, "for your work to-night shall cost you dearly. If you are not gone

from this house to-morrow the police shall remove you. You shall have no further opportunity to show your vile ingratitude."

"No, no, mamma," said Frances; "we have suffered too much to add to our sufferings. Father has done well and he shall stay with us in his rightful position. I am glad to know you, father," she added, throwing her arms about him and kissing him; "only——"

She broke down and wept, and Peter mingled his tears with hers.

"You are a fool, Frances," said madame severely.

"Never mind, dear," whispered Peter; "you'll get over it some time. And you won't be ashamed of your father hereafter. He was born and bred a gentleman, and his Desmond blood was as pure as milk, when the Russian stream was no better than a barbarian's. I've saved you, and I don't care for twenty allowances."

"But I might have saved him," sobbed Frances, "and now he is hopelessly lost."

## CHAPTER XX.

### PRINCE FLORIAN.

COUNT VLADIMIR was at this moment a disappointed man. Barbara had made a deeper impression on him than he had deemed possible, and he took her indifference keenly. His vanity had received a more serious wound than his affections. How was it possible that an elegant and titled aristocrat could fail in a quarter so open to the influence of such qualities as he possessed? Was the blade dulling through long service? He vainly tried to account for Barbara's coolness to him, and was inclined to suspect Florian of undue interference: but his good sense convinced him that the betrothed of Frances could have very little to do with Barbara at present.

"Unless," he thought, bitterly, "my instruction and example have made him a more consummate rascal than I imagine."

This supposition was somewhat wild, however, and he continued to visit Barbara and speculate drearily on the matter until chance revealed to him what reasoning and observation had failed to discover. He paid Florian his last installment of money two days before the election, and at the same time referred innocently but effectively to the oft-mentioned existence of his father.

"The prince, my employer," said he, "trusts that should your father turn up you will see that he submits to the present arrangement."

"He need have no fear," Florian replied agreeably. "I am sure of my ability to manage him better than the prince himself."

"I doubt it," said Vladimir, with a smile whose meaning pierced Florian's heart. "If you failed to deal with him by your roundabout American methods, Russian simplicity would surely make an end of him. I warn you of that now and finally."

"I am glad the whole matter is complete," Florian replied indifferently. "It has been very troublesome and dangerous"—with a placid but meaning look at the Count, who was pleased to let the insinuation pass.

"Well, our business relations, dear Prince, are ended, and your last hold upon your native country is cut off. I wish you all the honor and glory America can give you. Let me advise you once more to keep a bright lookout for your father."

He went away smiling, as if he knew how those last words rankled in Florian's heart. Why did he so persistently refer to the subject? Had he some news of the lost prince, and was the spy still on the trail, seeking to put out of the way this last obstacle to his master's security? Florian shook like a leaf at the suggestion, and, half-maddened at its possibility, sought counsel and sympathy from Barbara.

"The Count has seen," said she, "that you are annoyed by this idea of your father rising specter-like to demand his own, and delights in punishing you. I do not think your father can be living. You



have shown the most admirable diligence in looking for him. It would not do to be too open or too sharp in the search, for you might meet an impostor who would give you much trouble and expense."

"That is very true," said Florian, much relieved. "I am too scrupulous."

"It is highly probable that the prince is dead, or so hidden, in fear of his relatives, that it is too great a task to find him. I do regret one thing in the late transactions with the Count—that in renouncing your rights to your father's estate you did not insert the clause, 'until all heirs of the present family fail.' I have an idea I would look well in a Russian court. and I am so fond of a title."

"When you reign in the executive mansion, *ma chère*, you will hold a more assured and brilliant position."

"But suppose you do not get elected?"

"A senatorship then awaits me. But you must not begin to croak so soon. If money and influence mean anything, the position will be mine."

"But your religion," said Barbara, "is a great stumbling-block."

"I have glossed it over pretty well," he answered lightly, "and my plain utterances on many mooted questions have shut the mouths of my enemies tight. Away with these dismal speculations! You relieved me of my fears for my father, let me now banish your doubts of my election. This is love's hour. Politics and business too rudely intrude on it."

"Don't be foolish. That is the Count's talk, and I hate it."

"Poor fellow! his famous to-morrow is almost

here. He has hopes of you still. He is going to see you very soon and settle matters finally."

"He had an idea," she said indignantly, "that I might fall in love with him after the European fashion. I saw it from the first and resented it. Otherwise he would have made an impression on me, for he was a most charming man."

"That past tense is a hard criticism on him, my dear."

"There, there, more of the Russian foolishness."

"I beg pardon," said a voice at the door. "I do not think——"

Florian's haughty self-confidence never showed better than at this trying moment. He released Barbara's hand, and rose politely and coolly to greet Count Vladimir.

"You will excuse me," said the Count in a vain effort for composure.

"Certainly," said Florian. "Come in. We were just speaking of you, and you fit into the conversation very well."

"I am honored," said the Count. "Do you converse as tenderly and often about me with Miss Lynch, your affianced?"

"Not my affianced, Count. That little romance is dead."

"I begin to comprehend," said Vladimir, struggling desperately with anger and humiliation. "And am I to suppose that the lovely Mrs. Merrion is soon to console herself for her recent great sorrow by becoming——"

"Precisely," said Barbara, who had regained her usual coolness.

"I congratulate you both," said the Count, whitening to the lips, "and at a more convenient time I shall be happy as a friend to learn more of this extraordinary romance. Good-afternoon."

It was with blinded eyes and staggering gait that he found his way out of the mansion. A horrible bitterness and wild rage against himself and Florian filled his heart, and but for the shame of publicity he would have raved and cursed where he was like any madman.

"My teachings have turned on myself," he muttered. "I taught him and he has gone lower than I by degrees. But wait. Have patience, Vladimir."

He rushed into his own rooms and gave way to the passion which consumed him. Never had he been so bitterly humiliated, and never had he so poor an opportunity of revenging himself on his enemy. What was the poor consolation of a duel when he wished to tear his rival limb from limb—what benefit to him when death had placed his enemy beyond his reach? Oh, if he could but inflict upon him some maddening, lifelong torture. When his rage had cooled somewhat he noticed a letter addressed to him lying on the table, and its well known writing made him seize it hurriedly. It contained but one line: "*I have found him. What am I to do?*" A sardonic smile spread over his worn face. He held a match to the letter and stood smiling while it burned to ashes.

"No answer," he muttered, "is a death-warrant. This is the first drop in the bucket."

A little flame leaped up from the paper and

scorched his finger. He started angrily from the reverie into which he had fallen, stamped it under foot, and fell to thinking again. He was not so satisfied with his action when it was done. What had Florian's father done to him that he should wish to murder him? A word from him at this critical moment would save a human life, and he hesitated to give it because he had been humiliated. Humiliated! The word brought the passion of anger on again with two-fold intensity. He pictured anew the scene he had just witnessed in Barbara's drawing-room, and, foaming at the mouth, stamping and blaspheming, he shouted, "Let him die! Let him die, and his accursed son with him!"

The first result of this desperate passion appeared in Clayburgh. The Squire was assorting the morning mail, and he came across a New York postmark.

"Now who can that be from?" he said. "I don't know that I ever saw that handwriting before."

Ruth suggested that he should open it. He did, and read the name subscribed with a shout.

"Carter, by all that's amiable! It's pretty short for a spouter like him to write: 'Dear Squire' (just so; we're deeply in love with each other), 'I have the honor to announce my success in breaking off the match between Florian and Frances.' Ha! he's at that business yet."

Ruth trembled with apprehension.

"'It's a clean break,'" the Squire continued to read, "'and I'm proud of it; but I'm sorry, too, to let the blackguard off too easily. The divine Barbara had a hand in the game. But for her I

don't think it would have been a success. She wanted him pretty bad, and I hear they are going to make a match of it. She has tight hold of him, anyhow, and a worse pair never walked. So the thing is done at last, and I've kept my word almost to the letter. Of course he will not marry your daughter, but since he marries a Clayburgh girl it's the next best thing. What do you think?"

The Squire said "um" two or three times after reading this remarkable bit of news, and looked over it once or twice in a dazed way.

"Ruth," said he at last, "this is worse than sun-stroke. She was always so smart, I know, and so deep; but I had an idea Flory was deeper and smarter. We musn't let this get round the town; it would ruin the boy's chances in this county. Oh, that smiling, darned Barbara! She turned Catholic just to snare him, and she's got him, she's got him; I tell you she's got him body and soul, for that's her way."

Ruth slipped away sick at heart and ran out into the open air. She saw very clearly the meaning of Florian's new alliance and his reason for deserting Frances, and her heart was filled with a sort of loathing for the man who could play so poor and shabby a part. Against Barbara her soul rose up in horror. She dared not think of her at all, and turned her thoughts upon the sweet, gentle, and pious woman who had been made the victim of this unscrupulous pair. The day, though cloudy, was clear and beautiful. There was a soft murmur from the long beach where she stood, and the shores all about were aflame with the colors of autumn. A single

canoe was visible on the bay, and she recognized as its occupant Scott, the solitary. She waved her hand to him, and he came ashore.

"I have news for you, Scott. Florian is to be married to Barbara Merrion."

The hermit looked unusually old and worn as he stood beside her in his averted, slouching manner, and there were deep lines of care or age on his brown face. He received her information with his ordinary indifference.

"Poor fellow!" said he quietly, and waited silently for her to speak again.

"You are looking old," she ventured to say in sympathy.

"I *am* old," he replied curtly, and started when a swallow flew close to his face with a sudden whirr of its wings.

"Have you lost all interest in Florian?" she said, nettled by his manner.

"He has lost so much interest in that part of him which I best liked," he answered gently, "that I can see no use in thinking or talking about him. I suppose this woman is no honor to him."

"Not much. He threw up one that would have been."

"So, so—every step is down. God help him and us!" he added, with a long, weary sigh that surprised and touched her. It was plain to see that he was suffering, and less stoically than usual. A closer look at his red curls showed them thickly twined with gray; there were circles around his keen eyes, and the bearded mouth was tremulous from hidden feeling. She longed to comfort him, and knew not

how to begin. It was a new and astonishing phase in his character to see in him such evidences of the weaker man.

"I thought perhaps," she said hesitatingly, "that you might do something for him. He always thought so much of you, was ever so willing to do as you advised. I would dare to say that in the beginning you might have saved him."

"I hope you don't mean that," he said. "I'm sure you don't. I wouldn't think for a fortune I hadn't done my share in keepin' a man from evil. I knew him well. I saw there was no use. Don't you think I would have tried hard if there was? You know I would."

He was so vehement that the astonished Ruth could hardly believe that it was Scott who talked to her, but she dissembled her amazement.

"I suppose you would have helped him if you knew, Scott. But people see farther than you know—simple people I mean. And he talked so much of you that we saw, Linda and I—poor Linda!—that you had great influence over him. You did not use it—at least we thought you did not. He spoke with pain of your indifference. Now he is almost lost; this last act has completed his fall. I do not think you could benefit him any, yet it might do to try."

"We are all fools," said Scott, with self-bitterness. "I thought I did my best; you had better eyes. No, there is no use now; but if you think it would do any good I will see him when he comes again."

"Thank you, Scott. He needs friends now, if he ever did and he has but you and me and Frances."

"And one other—never mind who. But he is driving his best friends from him."

He fell into a reverie, and they both stood silent, with the splash of the water mingling with their thoughts. The hermit was excited and had permitted his emotion to be seen; but, as if regretful for his mistake, the old reserve began to settle over him again. He picked up his paddle suddenly and entered the boat without a word.

"I shall see you again?" she said, knowing he could not be detained.

"I s'pose—I dunno," he answered absently, and pushed off from the shore.

She watched him until distance hid all but the motion of the paddle from view, and felt strangely depressed in spirit. Billy Wallace and the Père came to tea that evening, to discuss the election and quarrel afterwards over their favorite game. The night was boisterous and stormy and had a wintry odor when the three old gentlemen, under Ruth's superintendence, sat down in the cosy parlor to a game of dominoes. The wind was howling and there was a roar from the waves on the beach, while the distant lighthouses twinkled weakly through the thick darkness. But these evidences of an ugly night without made the scene within only the more delightful, and the party prepared to pass a merry evening.

"It would be just like some old grandmother to take ill," said the Squire, "and call you away. There's one thing, though—no mortal man can cross the bay to-night, and you're safe from that direction. It puzzles me"—and he looked at Père Rougevin's



round, cheerful outline humorously, "to know what there is in you that sends people rushing after you, at all hours and under all circumstances, to doctor their sick souls. Can't a man die comfortably and quietly without you, and is it necessary that you must shout him into heaven or pray him in, or—what do you do, any way?"

"Why, papa——" Ruth began deprecatingly.

"Just so, girl. It's a fair question, and he's goin' to answer it; and you needn't look daggers at me for asking it."

"He reminds me——" said the priest smiling.

"No, I don't!" the Squire roared. "Keep clear of your anecdotes. You don't spin any more yarns on me. Why, Ruth, he has me posted all over the county at the tail end of forty stories."

Père Rougevin was silent for the moment, fairly weighed down by the force of Pendleton's lungs, and before he could speak there was a knock at the outside door.

"There it is," said Billy—"the sick call."

The servant brought Père Rougevin a card with a few pencil-marks upon it. He jumped up without much ceremony after reading it, and ran out into the hall. They heard a few hurried remarks from him and the stranger, and immediately he returned, bringing his visitor with him. His face was quite pale, but no one save Ruth noticed it, for all eyes were turned on the new-comer. The latter bore a curious resemblance to Scott, the hermit. He was dressed in the hermit's manner, had much of his silent, stern reserve, and wore his light beard in the same fashion; but over his eyes the peaked cap

threw such a shade as to leave his face a mystery. He stood quietly at the door and neither removed his hat nor took a chair.

"Pendleton," said the Père in some excitement, "I have a bit of bad news. Scott has disappeared. This man lives near him and says he has not been home since Friday. That Russian has been in the neighborhood, and foul play is feared."

Only Ruth saw the revelation that lay behind his words and manner and she burst suddenly into a fit of uncontrollable sobbing. A thousand insignificant incidents of the past ten years rushed before her mind.

"Oh!" she cried, "I see it all now. It is terrible!"

Her father stared.

"If any harm has come to Scott," said he, "that's enough. We'll avenge him. But what's the use of being frightened? If a man stays from home three or four days there's no harm in it. So dry your tears."

"O papa! don't you see? Scott is Florian's father."

"Yes," said Père Rougevin with emotion, "he is the lost prince, and we fear this Russian has been hired to injure him, and may have done it."

The silence which transfixed the Squire for a half minute was so deep that the ticking of the clock sounded like the strokes of a hammer. The roar of the storm beat up against the house. He sat there with his heavy face void of expression, his eyes turned on the priest in a vacant stare, while he tried to realize all that those astonishing words meant.

"Good God!" were his first hushed words. Billy

could say nothing, and Ruth was still sobbing. Père Rougevin and the stranger grew impatient for practical suggestions.

"I'm beat," said the Squire; "but I've got my breath again. I suppose it's so and I don't doubt but that if we had our eyes open we might have known it before. And now when he's most wanted he's gone, and that sneak is after him and means him harm. Well," he continued ponderously, rising, "we'll look for 'em both, and deal with 'em according to law. Young man, what have you to say about it?"

"The islands ought to be searched," said the stranger, "and a watch set on the waters, so that if foul play has done away with him his body may be found."

"And word should be sent immediately to Florian," said Ruth.

"I don't know about that," Pendleton remarked. "To-morrow will be a busy day for him, and he can't do any more than we can do."

"Not the slightest need of sending for him," Père Rougevin said hastily. "It will be time enough to notify him when we have found Scott or learn what has happened to him."

Ruth said no more on the matter, but when the Squire had put on his great-coat she was in the hall ready to go with them and prepared to put in action some idea of her own. They raised no objection to her company, and all rode up together to the village, where the Squire began his search for a boat able to stand the fury of a southwest wind. Ruth in the meantime had sent to Florian the following telegram :

"Come at once, if you would save your father's life." By the time she reached the pier again Pendleton had engaged a tug for the search, and the vessel was getting up steam. A crowd stood about, curious to know the reasons of a water-journey on so tempestuous a night; but the Squire sailed away with his party in lofty silence, giving only a hint to his hungry neighbors that it was concerned with the coming election. Once on the water he called a council in the small cabin.

"We're going this thing rather blind," said he, "and I would like to hear your opinions and get a little more reason and certainty into it. I suppose we can search all the small islands to-night by ourselves with lanterns; but if we don't find him we must get help to-morrow, if we mean to do the business thoroughly."

"There are certain places," said the stranger, "which Scott frequented, and it might be worth the trouble to examine them. I know them all. But it is more likely that he avoided them when pursued by the Russian. You must know that Scott expected his identity to be some day discovered and had provided hiding-places among the islands. The principal of these was under his own house; but its secret the Russian discovered a few days ago, and he abandoned it. If he fancies that the others are known he will not go near them."

"Ah!" said the Squire, "now you have given us a fair start, young man. We must begin with his own house and island first, then take the others in succession."

He went out to the pilot-house and the Père fol-

lowed him, leaving Ruth and the stranger alone in the cabin. The boat rocked and plunged uncomfortably in the heavy sea and the great waves dashed against the windows. Nothing was visible outside save the twinkling lights on the shore.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Rossiter," she said, giving the stranger her hand after a moment's awkward silence, "that I did not recognize you until you spoke this evening. I am very glad to meet you and to see that you are well."

"Thank you," said Paul nervously, and was silent. Not a word was uttered concerning his long and mysterious absence from the world, and both were glad of it, for the greatness of the calamity which seemed to threaten them overshadowed minor things completely. A sudden quieting of the waves and the rushing of wind through tree-tops signified that they had entered the tortuous channel leading into Eel Bay, and in a half-hour more they were sailing opposite the hermit's cabin. All went ashore save Ruth, who felt that she would be a hindrance in the search, and so remained leaning against the deck-rails, watching the movements of their lanterns as they walked over the small island. They returned to the boat unsuccessful and steamed to another spot, which was searched with the same result; and so through the whole stormy night they continued their vain pursuit of the lost prince, returning to Clayburgh by sunrise for breakfast and additional help. Ruth did not accompany them. Overcome with weariness, she did not feel equal to the fatigue of a twelve hours' journey—which was strictly true, but her real reason for remaining was the telegram

which Florian sent her that morning announcing his arrival in Clayburgh for that evening.

It was a dull, stolid day. The winds had died away, and the sun was buried in thick clouds before it had been two hours shining, and a bitter suspicion of snow was in the cold, heavy air. At ten it began to rain, and the thick mists shut out the river and brought a deeper chill to the atmosphere. Time hung the heavier on her hands. She could not read, and thought was distressing. A few old gossips came in to hear the news of the day and discover the cause of so much mysterious running about in the quiet town, and she replied in dark and secret language, with many hints of greater surprises yet in store for them, and sent them away satisfied and yet unsatisfied. In the stores and saloons and kitchens that day the Squire's movements were thoroughly canvassed. A mystery so important as to require a tug and fifteen men to carry it out was a delightful morsel in dull November, and the peaceful citizens enjoyed it; but when the telegraph messenger passed the word that a special train was due in Clayburgh at four o'clock that afternoon, nearly three hours ahead of the regular train, the excitement spread to the highest grades of town society, and even the ministers trotted down to the depot under the same umbrella to examine into this second wonder of the day. But Florian knew his native village well. Half a mile from the depot Ruth met him with the carriage, and the train moved into the station without a soul save the employees on board. So with every disappointment the mystery grew.

A more wretched man than Florian Ruth had never seen. His proud bearing was gone, his proud self-possession had melted from him like snow, and his pale, drawn face and listless manner showed what he was suffering. He took her hand gratefully as he entered the carriage. She tried to speak, but her own sobs were too powerful.

"You need not tell me," he said. "We are too late. I know that, and I might have saved him; I might have known long ago."

He repeated the last words over and over like one in delirium. When he had grown calmer she told him all the circumstances of the last few days, beginning with her last talk with the hermit, and he sat with head bowed, listening, nor made any comment for a time.

"Where were our eyes," she said crying, "that we did not see through this loving imposture long since? A spy could discover him, and we could not."

"The spy has exceptional resources," he answered; "and yet it would have been so easy to have reasoned. You remember the interest he took in me, and I recall the dreams I had of him kissing me, poor father! in my sleep; and how in the graveyard here one night he held me in his arms with his cheek against my own; and the time he came to New York, risking so much for love of me. Then his behavior towards Linda on her death-bed. I believe she knew it, for she looked from him to me so strangely—I see it now; I could not see it then. And my mother's behavior when he was present or spoken of. What a life!" and he added after a

pause, with a shudder of horror and grief, "and what a death, after so much self-denial and love!"

"Oh, be patient!" said she, attempting cheerfulness. "They are searching for him bravely, and he is so cunning and active that it will take an expert woodman to overmatch him."

"His pursuer," said Florian gloomily, "is by profession an assassin. He has but one instinct, that of death, and he will follow, follow, follow like a hound, never wearying, never stopping, cunning and pitiless as a tiger, until his victim is dead. I can see him now crawling through some lonely patch of timber in the rain with that white face of his shining in the gloom."

She had to admit that the picture was not overdrawn, and they came to the house in silence.

"I will not go in," he said; "I must get a boat and join in the search. I am going mad, I think."

"But there is no wind, Florian, and you can get no tug, for there is none here. Better wait until the rain stops; there will be a wind then strong enough to make the boat of use."

He held up his hand in the air.

"There is wind enough," said he. "I could not stay; I must go."

She went into the house and brought out some oil cloths for him to put on as a protection against the rain. With a servant to manage the boat they started, taking a course straight down the river in order to meet the tug; but the wind soon died away almost entirely when they were opposite the well-known channel leading into Eel Bay, and Ruth proposed, seeing how impatient he grew, that they



would go to the hermit's cabin and wait there for a favorable wind. It was done, and for the first time in years he entered his father's house.

"What a palace for a prince!" he said, and a great bitterness filled his heart as memory after memory connected with the old cabin rose before him. Darkness came on, and the servant lighted the old candle, and the fire was started in the fireplace. He sat reading Izaak Walton or wandering uneasily to the shore, while Ruth, wearied, lay down to sleep in the inner room. The night passed in a dead calm. At four o'clock in the morning the clouds parted in the northwest and the first suspicion of a wind stirred the water. He waked her, saying gently: "We must be going." It was cold and unpleasant in the damp morning air, but a few stars shone faintly overhead. As before, they went straight down the river, taking the wider channels in order to intercept the tug if she should be returning. At daylight they had reached Alexandria Bay, and in the distance later on, as the sun was rising, they saw the tug steaming further down the river.

"They have not found any trace of him yet," said Ruth. "They are searching still, or they would be returning."

"Why do they take the islands below instead of those above?" he asked.

"I believe they have a guide on board who lived for some time with your father," she replied, "and he thinks he must have fled in that direction. When I last saw him he was going down the river."

They sailed on, the wind still cold and feeble as before, and in two hours had reached the island.

Florian would not go near the tug or make himself known to any one, but went ashore in his oil cloths and silently joined in the search, while Ruth sailed to the tug for information. No success yet and no clue! When she returned Florian was waiting for her on the shore.

"They will never make anything of this," he said. "It is too wild and they will have to cover much ground. Let us go back and search the islands above."

To Ruth this seemed even a more hopeless task, but she did not feel it necessary to tell him so. The wind was freshening from the northwest, and with frequent tacking—for the channel in places was narrow—they arrived at Solitary Island a little after noon. On the Canadian shore stood a farmhouse, where they ate dinner, and afterwards they landed at Grindstone and began preparations to search that island through its entire length of seven miles or more. Florian seemed unwearied, but Ruth was half dead from fatigue. Obstacles of every sort began to fall in their way. They had endeavored to secure horses from an island resident and help, which he was disposed to give only for enormous pay, and his petty delays wasted the precious time until half-past three. When at last they were almost ready, Ruth with beating heart, pointed out to Florian a canoe with a single occupant making for Solitary Island; and he, pale as death, watched it for a moment, and then, seizing her hand, ran down to the boat and bade the servant hoist the sail. His eyes did not for an instant leave the figure in the canoe, and a flush of deep excitement and tender feeling

spread over his face as Scott stepped leisurely from his boat and walked slowly to his cabin. He had taken the pains to pull up his canoe on the beach, and after entering the house closed the door. Evidently no harm had happened to him, and the noise which had been made over his accidental disappearance was premature. It was a few minutes past four when their boat touched the shore. Four o'clock in the afternoon of the first day of November was a moment which had scarred Ruth's memory years back so badly that the hour never struck without bringing the tears to her eyes. At that hour on that day Linda died. She wept now with a violence that surprised Florian as he helped her from the boat and led her joyfully to the cabin. He pushed open the door with some difficulty because of a heavy movable obstacle on the other side. When he saw and recognized the object he stood quite still for a moment, pushed Ruth gently back and, calmly as might be, knelt beside the fallen form of his father and put his hand over the heart. It was forever stilled. The pallid face and half-closed eyes were evidence enough without the bullet-wound and the blood stains on his garments. Scott was dead. In his hand he held a small crucifix, and the tears which he had shed in his last moments still lay on his cheek.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE PRINCE'S STORY.

It was a rare day in Clayburgh—rare for November. The air had a golden, fine-spun clearness, and the blue river was bluer than ever, although the islands, no longer green, showed their gray sides over the sparkling waters like faded tombstones in a spruce forest. The village was not one whit less dull than usual, and villagers shook their heads over the burst of unexpected sunshine. The late tragedy which had taken place had ruffled for a few hours the placid stream of existence. The affair was nobody's business in particular. There was no widow, no children, no relatives. Scott had lived and died a lonely man, and the violence of his taking off concerned only society in general and the officers of the law. Had he been a popular, sociable fellow there might have been great excitement; but it being a case of nobody's funeral, no one minded it after the shock was over and all had been said about it that could possibly be said. Clayburgh had a public calamity to grieve over. Florian had been defeated; his defeat had hurt it to the quick. It could not understand the counties lying to the south and southwest. Were they ignorant of the merits of the candidate, or had they been practised upon by designing rivals or office-seeking Whigs? The dem-

ocrats had deserted their candidate by thousands. The rest of the ticket had been elected. Florian alone, the pride of Clayburgh, had been "scratched" by his supposed friends and left a total ruin upon the battle-field. What was the murder of a solitary, sour fisherman to such a crime!

However, the villagers did not, in their deep grief for their candidate, forget neighborly duties to the dead. On the second day after Scott's death a fair number of the fathers, in blue swallow-tails, black chokers, and white felt hats, made the pleasant journey across the river and through the islands with a deep sense of the favor they were conferring on the dead man in taking so much trouble to pay him funeral honors. They were severely taken aback on finding, when the boat landed them on Solitary Island, that they formed a very respectable minority of the people there assembled. Boats of all kinds lay along the shore. Their owners were scattered about the island in holiday clothes as fresh and stylish as those which came from Clayburgh. The old white hats walked up to the cabin with muttered "I had no ideas," and paid their respects to the man whom living they had rarely presumed to address. He lay in the little kitchen which for twenty years had been his living room. The brown habit of the scapular was his shroud and was the source of much speculation and wonderment. For no one had been aware that Scott held any religious opinions. The serene, meditative face had a new expression which few had ever before seen. The close-fitting cap was gone and the bushy whiskers trimmed neatly. Was this really the face of the

common fisherman? Around a reverential forehead, white as snow, clustered the yellow locks. The regular and sweet features were Florian's own, but less stern, more exalted, more refined in their expression. The people looked at this unexpected countenance in awe, feeling there was more in this man than they had fathomed.

Izaak Walton was in its place on the table. Candles burned there around a crucifix. An altar stood beside the bedroom door, and on it lay the black vestments for the Mass. Scott was after all a Catholic; and while the neighbors owned to a sense of disappointment at this discovery, they also acknowledged a deeper respect for the character of the dead. Beside the coffin sat Ruth weeping, her veil down, her hands clasped in prayer, her eyes rarely turning from the face of Linda's father. Thus had she sat since with her own hands she had prepared him for his rest. Linda's father! Oh! wasted years which had been spent in ignorance of this rich treasure. Now she knew why her heart had gone out to him, and she wept again and again as every memory showed the father's love for his children and his children's friend. She could not understand it! How could any one have been so blind? How could love have felt no thrill from this magic presence, when hate discovered and destroyed it? A rough costume, a tight-fitting cap, a silent manner had hidden him from his own and not from his enemies. She wrung her hands and wept as this sharp reflection pierced her heart. But what need to trouble the mind now with conflicting thoughts? It was all over. In a strange land,

among a strange people, the exile had died! In a poor hut the Russian prince, dead and cold, received from the hands of plain citizens those rites which kings would have been proud to give! In a free country he had fallen as helplessly as in the land of the czars! Its laws had been no protection to him. Little he cared now, indeed, for what had been or for all his wrongs; what he asked was a grave and a prayer for his soul.

In the closed bedroom reclined the lately defeated candidate for the chief magistracy of the State. His costume was not one of mourning, but such as he had been accustomed to wear, correct and gentlemanly, with a smack of over-polish. His face was a trifle pale and wearied. No evidence of any deep disappointment for his defeat or of any shock at the violent taking off of his father was visible. For a man in his unique position he bore himself very well. Looking at the dead hermit, and saluting him as his father after they had followed him to his cabin, Florian accepted the hard conditions which Providence had placed upon him, as he had taught himself to accept all unchangeable facts. No tears, no excitement, no curious questions, but a complete acceptance of the state of affairs that was marvelous. There was a show of irritation occasionally against two persons, Paul and Père Rougevin—so faint that only the latter perceived it, because he suspected its existence. These two men had been favored with the hermit's intimacy. They had, as it were, supplanted the heir in his father's affections, being, as Florian well knew, better conformed to his father's idea of what men should be. Almost

mechanically the irritation showed itself. Père Rougevin kept himself and the unconscious Paul out of the great man's way. For this reason they were rarely seen in the dead room, whither Florian often came to gaze quietly on the prince's face.

It had been decided to bury Scott on the island, as he had often desired, and to show no signs of mourning which would lead the neighbors to suspect the real state of affairs. The grave was dug among the pines on the highest point of land on the island, and Père Rougevin had brought over the requisites for the Mass of requiem. Ruth had gently hinted the propriety of laying the prince beside Linda, but prudence forbade. It was never to be known save to the few who this poor lonely fisherman had been.

Near noon the crowd assembled in the room and about the door at a signal from the Squire. The singers from the Clayburgh choir intoned the first notes of the "Kyrie Eleison," and the singing rose and fell on the clear air in that beautiful solitude like the sound of weeping. The incense floated through the door, the holy water was sprinkled, and the tones of the priest were heard delivering the sermon. Then came the shuffling of feet and the outpouring of the people. The Squire gathered them all before him in order to select the bearers, but in reality to give the mourners time for an unobserved parting with their dead. It was done very quickly. The Père and Paul and Billy looked for the last time on the handsome face. Ruth kissed the forehead with an involuntary moan. For a moment, as the son pressed his cheek to his father's, his features were twisted by an internal anguish more intense



than physical pain. They screwed down the coffin-lid, and the bearers entering, a procession was formed. Florian offered his arm to Ruth. To the singing of the psalms they moved down the slope in front of the house and up the opposite hill. Here was the grave. All around were the islands, with no human habitation in view. Below were the placid waters. The voice of the priest blessing the tomb arose: "Lord, in the bosom of whose mercy rest the souls of the faithful dead, bless this grave and give it into Thy angels' charge. Loosen the bonds of sin which press the soul of him whose body is here buried, that for ever more with Thy saints he may rejoice in the possession of Thee, through Christ our Lord. Amen." The clods rattled on the coffin with a sound familiar both to Ruth and Florian. Ten years ago that very day they had buried Linda! The crowd broke up respectfully and yet with relief, and were not down to the shore when the laugh followed the joke and the healthy concerns of life banished the mists of death. Thank God, the world on this gloomy day was not all gloom! The white hats and blue coats boarded the *Juanita* with hilarity, a fleet of skiffs and sail-boats fluttered out into the bay, and very soon the island was left to the Squire and his party.

An awkward restraint was in the air. The Squire had no one to praise him for the glorious manner in which he had carried out the programme, and, warned by the preoccupation of the others, dared not sound his own trumpet.

"You'll stop around for a few days, Flory," he said. "You can have the run of the house, and I'll

take it upon my shoulders to keep off the crowd, unless you go to Buck's."

"I shall stay here for a time," said Florian. They all looked at him, and a glance from Ruth kept the Squire silent. "My lawyer can attend to whatever business there is in New York. Let me thank you for your kindness during these few days. I am deeply grateful."

"I presume," said the priest rather hurriedly, "you prefer to remain here until you return to New York?" Florian nodded. "There are some matters which you would probably like to be acquainted with before your departure. When you find it convenient I am ready to tell you all that I know concerning your father. Mr. Rossiter can furnish you with some facts, perhaps——"

"I am the bearer of a message from the prince to his son," said Paul. "It is best to defer its delivery for a few days, however. Whatever I know about him I am most willing to tell."

The faintest irritation showed itself in Florian's manner, and his eyes blazed with some hidden feeling which the Père alone observed.

"I thank you both," said Florian. "In a few days I shall hear you; not now, if you please—not now."

"Mr. Rossiter, you are my guest for the present," said the Père, "and you will accompany us to the village. There is no need to delay longer."

The Squire went out to get ready the yacht in a dazed way, for he could make nothing of these arrangements.

"The boy has less nonsense about him than the

common," he said to Billy, "and it's no sickly sentiment that keeps him here. Who'd think, to see him, that he was defeated in a 'lection two days ago, and lost his father before he found him?"

"I'm glad he's not my son," said Billy, with a snuffle. "I'd rather have nobody at my grave, nobody, than such a stick. He's worse than Sara."

The yacht sailed away and left Forian sitting on the boulder over the spot where Linda had received the fatal wetting. He thought of that and of many other incidents of the time. He felt on his hot cheek the cool breezes of that first night on the island, when his dreams awoke him and sent him rambling along the shore. Those dreams of his had been a wonderful reality. His father had really kissed him in his sleep. It was pleasant to recall those kisses. He was first in his father's heart in spite of his sternness and secrecy. Then there was the night in the graveyard, when for a moment he lay in his arms and felt his cheek lovingly against his own. Accident then, now the purpose was visible. And Linda knew it before she died. Happy Linda, whose innocence merited such a reward, and to whom it had not been given to know him first when death had claimed him, and to suspect that—Again that spasm of mental agony twisted his features shapeless for an instant, but passed away beneath his wonderful self-poise. "That way madness lies," was the thought which shaped itself in his mind. He sat there all the afternoon, and when night came, heedless of the change, he walked up the hill and sat down on the grave—the first grave on Solitary Island! Three days passed—days of some anx-

ity to the friends of Florian. What was he doing on the island? His letters were sent to him daily, and there were many of them, while the mail sent back by him was voluminous enough to show that his idle hours were few. Yet Ruth was apprehensive. About what she could hardly say; so with the Squire she called on Père Rougevin to hear the latest news of Florian. "He will be here within the hour," said the priest. "I received a note from him to that effect. He is coming to learn what I know of his father."

"I am so glad that—well," and she stopped abruptly, "after all, I do not know that he is well."

"There is nothing to disturb him particularly," said the priest, with the faintest touch of scorn, which the Squire took for praise. "He remained on the island partly to investigate the cabin where his father lived, and partly to enjoy quiet and retirement after an arduous campaign. Sentiment does not enter largely into Florian's make-up."

"He's too much of a Yankee for that," said the admiring Squire. "There's nothing in this world can put Flory down, unless death. I just dote on that boy."

The sharp ring of the door-bell sounded at the moment.

"This is he," said the Père. "I invite you both to remain and hear what I am to tell about this so-called Scott. It is a curious history and contains nothing that you may not know."

"If Florian does not object——"

"Don't you fret," said the Squire, cutting off Ruth's

polite remarks, for he was eager to stay. "Don't you fret. Flory has no family secrets from me—us, I mean."

When Florian entered the Squire saved any one the trouble of replying to his grave salutation by at once taking the position of chairman of the meeting. Ruth was satisfied to note in silence the changes which a few days had made in the politician's face. It was paler than usual, and the eyes seemed sunken and weary. The evidences were that Florian had not passed as quiet a time at the island as the priest believed, but in the hurry and gentle excitement of an animated conversation the paleness and hollowness disappeared to a great degree.

"As you intend to return to-night," said Père Rougevin, by the way of preface, "I suppose you are willing to have me begin my narration. I wish that Miss Ruth and her father should hear it, if you have no objections."

Of course Florian had none, and the Squire was delighted.

"I became aware of the facts which I tell to you," he said, "not by any favor on your father's part, but through an accident. In the ordinary course of my parish business the prince found it necessary to confide in me. If he was more precise in his account of his life to me than to any other, it was because I insisted on knowing the whole story, with every shade that time had cast upon it.

"You know the title which belongs to him and how he lost it. He was a Catholic and favored a poor relative, of no principle. He lost his position, and almost his life, through this relative, who, by

intrigues quite possible in Russia, convinced the Czar that his relative, your father, was conspiring against him. A friend laid before the unfortunate Prince the state of affairs. He saw at once that nothing short of a miracle could save him. He was young and practically friendless, for a Catholic noble of the blood royal was unique and stood alone. With his two children he hurried into France.

"The fate of his wife, the Princess, was particularly sad. She was a woman of mind and will. When the Prince spoke of exile she refused to leave her country. On good and reasonable grounds, however. Her family was powerful. She at least was safe, and she was bent on doing her utmost to save her husband's estates and name. But for safety's sake she urged the Prince to depart with the children, which he did, without misgivings, yet without hope. His brave wife returned to the home of her father, made many efforts to save the estates, and gained so many important favors from the emperor that the scheming relative saw his plotting in danger of coming to naught. In her father's house the Princess died suddenly, of poison.

"There was no crime, it seems, at which this relative would stop. The Prince and his children—his name was Florian, like your own, sir—shortly felt the sting of his unscrupulousness. Tracked to Paris, to Madrid, to Genoa, to London, they had many narrow escapes from death at the hands of his agents. The wilds of America offered him a refuge, to them he fled. Hope was dead in him. Henceforth his one effort was to hide himself and his children from the assassin. He could not do it, as you

have seen, but all that man could do he did, and, if he fell himself, probably saved you. The rest you know."

It was abrupt, concise, unsympathetic, this recital of an unfortunate man's life, and it left as many points unsettled as had been told. Florian, however, was prepared with a bristling array of questions. He burned to discover the spirit of his father's strange life, and could not be content with these dry bones.

"Much of this information was contained in the letters and documents held by Mrs. Wallace," said Florian.

"I do not know," replied the priest. "I never saw the letters. Your father fondly preserved them as mementoes of a time forever gone. Mrs. Wallace removed them to her secret closet without his permission."

"I thought my father of no religion," said Florian. "I had never seen about him in all the time that I knew him a single evidence of his faith. Was he a——"

"No," said the Père, with a touch of generous feeling, "he was a fervent Catholic, such a Catholic as misfortune makes; but it was a part of his plan to let little be known about himself. In an obscure village miles eastward from here he went to Mass and confession."

"Yet his whole speech had a certain coloring," Ruth said earnestly—"a spirituality which only a Catholic could feel and show. We thought it was philosophy—backwoods philosophy."

"He was a great philosopher, too," said the Père.

"His education had been thorough. He was a finished scholar."

"Then the Izaak Walton was a blind," blurted out the half-indignant Squire, "and his talk about governments meant more'n *I* thought."

"It was his deep, and sincere, and simple piety that thrilled me most," Ruth said, with glownig eyes. "However else he deceived us, he could not hide that, and I loved him for it. He was like a child."

"Of that there is no doubt. Suffering of the severest sort had chastened him beyond belief. For one so tossed about and so brought up as he, his simplicity was as sweet as unexpected," the priest said feelingly.

To this compliment Florian gave no apparent heed.

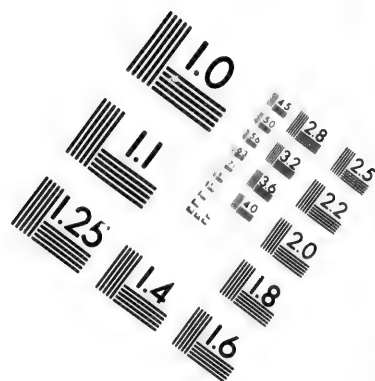
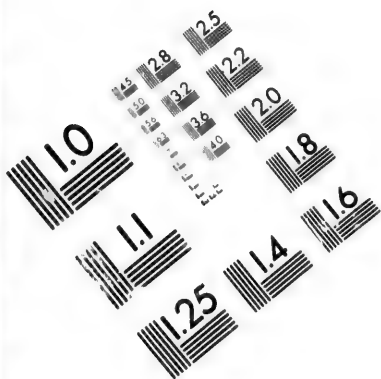
"Before Linda died," he said, "I suppose, from what I recall of that time, that he told her his secret."

"On the very day of her death he told her. He found it hard to make her see the wisdom of keeping it a secret still, from you at least; but with my aid he succeeded."

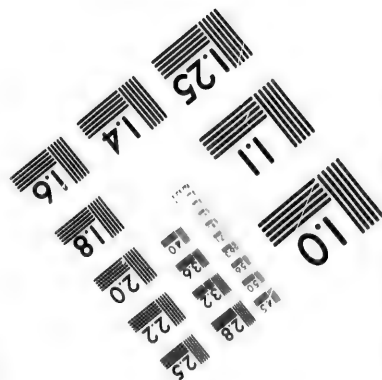
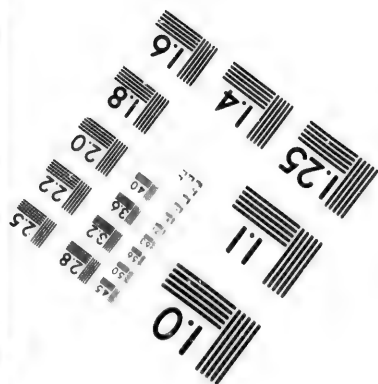
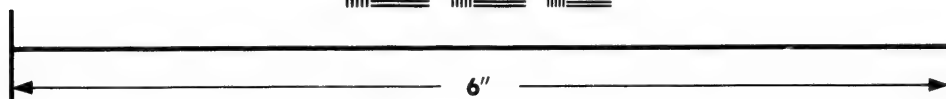
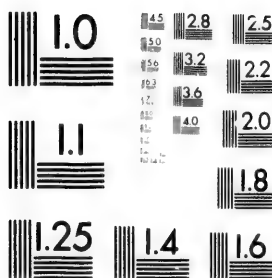
"Poor Linda! poor child!"

Ruth glanced from the priest to the politician regretfully. There was very little in the manner of either to warrant a suspicion of mutual dislike, but the priest's deliberate mention of his connection with the task of keeping Linda silent was a simple declaration of war. Passing over the hermit's visit to New York, he came to the events immediately preceding the late tragedy.



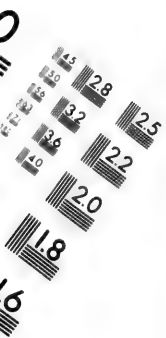


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"The letter which I received from an unknown friend warning me of the Russian's designs against me was probably penned by my father?"

The Père shrugged his shoulders. He did not know of the letter, nor had the hermit told him of it.

"Was he apprehensive, after the visit of the spy, that trouble was coming upon him?"

"Well, yes," said the priest, slowly; "yes, he was. But he had so much confidence in his disguise that he feared only for you. When he heard how you arranged the matter he was thoroughly satisfied and said, 'Now the danger is over.'"

"Did he have any occasion to lose this confidence afterwards?"

"Not until two weeks ago, when a heavy sadness disturbed him which he could not shake off. At that time he was not aware of the presence of his murderer. He must have discovered it suddenly and frightfully for his usual prudence and sagacity to have deserted him at a critical moment. His end is wrapped in mystery, as was his life, and I believe he preferred to have it so."

There was for a short space a little solemn thinking.

"I found a handkerchief in the old cabin the time the Count Behrenski and I were here together," said Florian. "It had a faint monogram, 'W'—"

"It was Mrs. Wallace's," interrupted the priest. "She stole to the island that night to warn him of the presence of the Count, and to bid him beware of meeting your friend."

"And there is nothing further known of his hidden life; no letters, no scraps, no familiar insights,

nothing to show what the man was under all his misfortunes, to make one feel that he was—a—father."

The last words came hesitatingly, and were answered by a curt nod from the Père.

"I have his last letter," he replied; "it was written for you to read in the event of his death. And Paul Rossiter may tell you things which he has not told to me. More than that——"

A shrug of the shoulders finished the sentence.

"Linda had some idea of it," continued the Père, "and it made her very happy in dying. Perhaps his old confessor might be able to give you a glimpse of his interior life. I doubt it, however. It seems to have been a sanctuary into which angels only could enter."

"You have, then, so high an opinion of his life," said Ruth gratefully. The Père bowed and said nothing for a few minutes, but, as if regretting his moroseness, he went on to say:

"He was a martyr to his religious convictions of course. He could have easily won the favor of his emperor by embracing the Greek religion and, had he been a less tender father, might have lived in comparative comfort. The fear of bringing upon his children the sufferings he had endured made him self-forgetful."

"If you will let me have the letter you spoke of," said Florian, who had been indulging in a reverie, "I will be going. The hour is late, and the island is a good distance off." The Père silently handed him a package, and rose as if to end a rather distasteful interview.

"I hope," said Ruth, "that you are not going to bury yourself in that dreary solitude. Before you return to New York we would be happy to have you stop with us a few days."

"And now that the cold weather is here," said the Squire, who felt himself on familiar ground for the first time that evening, "you'll be apt to stick there if the ice came on too thin to bear ye and too thick for a boat. So you had better make a move double quick. And now see here, Flory, you ain't doing the right thing by the party and by yourself. You ought to be in New York making cover for what is left of your hay. Your father was a good man, but the best man that ever died wasn't quite worth half the fuss made over him."

Florian received this lecture as pleasant badinage, nor did he make any reply to Ruth's kindly invitation, but, wishing them all good-night, politely withdrew and made his way across the river in a dreary unsettled way, as if he had started for no place and forgotten the harbor he had left. He was very eager to know something of the real life of his father, and somewhat bitter at finding himself left out so regularly in the cold. This one knew and that one knew some trait or incident of the hermit, and Linda had received a full measure of knowledge at the last moment. He alone knew nothing. His thirst—and it increased every day—was always unsatisfied. His father spoke to him only through the cold, unsympathetic channels of dead letters or of outsiders who cared little for him. It was a hard condition. He accepted it in his usual matter-of-fact way, but it hurt him nevertheless.

When the island was reached and the door closed on all the world—on all his care and disappointments, on all his ambitions—he pulled the curtains over the window, replenished the fire, and with Izaak Walton at his elbow sat down to read his father's last communication to him. Just as his father had sat often during the nights of thirty years? The old charm of the place was not yet lost to him; it increased rather because of its pathetic associations. Here he had slept and dreamed that his father kissed him; here the hermit had made a last attempt to keep him in Clayburgh; here he had tried to discover, without much if any help from God, what his vocation in life might be. The warning which the Prince had given him still haunted his memory, but he had not gotten over his old skepticism on that point and recalled it with a smile. By the light of the old tallow candle he opened his father's letter and read reverentially :

“My son, my most dear son : I have little time to speak to you. I fear, I am sure, our enemy is on my track. I thought you had forever averted the danger. It is not so. These people will not be satisfied until they have killed me. God's will be done! When you read this I shall be dead. Much obscurity hangs over my life. It will never be removed in this world. It will pain you, but it was ordered so for your good. Believe me, your father, every moment of my life was a study to save you from what will befall me, every word that I have said to you dictated by the strongest love. Be content with what you may learn of me from strangers. I give you

my love and bid you adieu. I return to you, according to promise, a well-known document. My most dear son, a stranger to me all my life, your father hopes and prays to meet you in heaven.

“FLORIAN.”

He read it over three, four, ten times, with a more vivid picture each time of the circumstances under which it was written, until the long suffering of his father's life and the agony of that farewell was tearing his own heart, until sobs and tears came to show him that he was no more, after all, than a son of man. He felt humiliated, but only before himself. In these moments of meditation that peculiar twisting of the features took place which had been noticed during the funeral, as if his very vitals had been seized by the grasp of intolerable pain. With his strong will he reasoned its cause down, but still the shadow haunted him night and day.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### BARBARA'S SPITE.

AFTER a defeat the vanquished naturally hides his head for a short time. This reflection did not at all soothe the anxiety of Barbara over Florian's absence. Twenty times a day she tried to read between the lines of the passionate letters from Clayburgh, and because she found nothing her anxieties increased tenfold. Ruth was there, and who could tell what would happen? He had deserted one woman. Such a man was not to be trusted; and if the old love were still strong after ten years' of absence from its object, what would it not be in her presence, what might it not dare if Ruth said, I am willing? Finally Barbara packed her trunk and started for Clayburgh to pay her old friend a visit. She was a little fearful of the effect of her appearance upon Florian, but trusted to luck and her own charms to allay his anger.

The sight of her stepping from the train sent a cold chill along the Squire's spine, and Ruth's first glimpse of her coming up the walk to the house produced a serious misgiving in that lady's heart. She was going to stay with them, of course. The city was so dull that she could no longer endure it, and it was *so* long since she had been to Clayburgh. While she was removing her bonnet and preparing to make



herself comfortable the Squire found opportunity to whisper to Ruth :

"Not one word about Flory. *That's* who she's after."

"Barbery," said he solemnly, as he sat down before her, "don't you attempt to tell me you came all the way from New York jest to see your old friends. You don't care two coppers for us. You've got an object in coming here, and I want to know it. Because if you're after me I may as well give in at once and save the trouble of a long courtship. If you're not, then I can rest satisfied and you can stay here as long as you wish too."

"The vanity of an old fellow," said Barbara. "Now what could I possibly want with an antique like you?"

"An antique!" said the Squire, dazed. "Ruth, can you sit by and hear your father called an antique by a mere strip of a widow? If you can you have no more notion of your duty than any other woman."

"Well, papa, you are the sheriff—put Barbara in jail."

"I wish I could," said he gloomily. "She's not safe even in jail, though: she'd bewitch the jailer, the chief of police, lawyers, judge. There ain't nothing, in fact, to hold her. Barbery, speak right out. Are you after me?"

And the Squire groaned in mock anguish of spirit.

"No, I'm not after you, you poor man: I have nothing to do with you, except to eat your dinners and make myself expensive and troublesome for a few days."

"The hull house is yours, my girl, and all that's in

it. If you say the word you can have any man in the town that you're fishing for brought right here into the parlor, and I'll help you do the courting. I will, by Jupiter!" shouted the Squire, joyfully.

"Thank you; but I am engaged already, Squire."

"Jes' so," said Pendleton dubiously; "but you're not safe, engaged or married."

Sitting quietly in the parlor after dinner she flung down her gage of battle to them with disconcerting suddenness.

"I suppose you are both aware of the object of my visit here," she said.

"Well, Barbary," said the Squire coolly, "Flory's high game, and I don't blame you, but you'll never get him; mark my words—you'll never get him."

"You know where he's hiding. Why do you not tell me what I want to know?"

"Tisn't fair, my dear. Flory must have a show," the Squire said with much gravity; "and as he's somewhat cast down now, it wouldn't do to let you go cooing around him. You'd have him married to you in a wink. Your cooing doesn't suit as well after marriage as before, and I'm going to save him from you, if I can."

"You might as well know," she said, with heightened color, "that I am Florian's promised wife. Will you tell me where he is?"

"If you're engaged to him," the Squire remarked wickedly, "you ought to know where he is."

"I have a batch of letters which he has written to me every day since he came here, and I know that he is here, and that is all."

"You'll have to find him yourself, then," said the

Squire ; "and, as we don't care to mix ourselves up in your doings, perhaps you wouldn't mind going to stay with your friends in the town."

"I have already decided on that, you funny old man, for it would be too much to accept of your hospitality farther."

Ruth rose and left the room without a word, hurt beyond measure at the vulgarity of Barbara's character. That it was light and insincere she well knew, but she had always given her credit for a certain refinement and natural pride sufficiently strong to prevent such behavior as she had just shown. It was bitter for her to recall that she had confided the tenderest secret of her heart to this woman, and that nothing might hinder her from publishing it to the world. Barbara looked after her with light scorn, and the expression in her face stung the Squire into a rage.

"You've done enough for one day," he said, purpling, "to give you a chance at a ten years' penance. That good girl sees what you are to the core, and if she doesn't make it known I will."

"That good girl!" said Barbara, with a sneering laugh. "She was always so good! Yet she encouraged Florian into offering her marriage, and then threw him off. She went to a convent in a streak of gushing piety, and when the gush stopped came running down to New York after a little poet upon whom her heart was set, and, if she had found him would have proposed to him and married him. That modest girl indeed!"

With this shot Barabara transferred her effects and herself to the hotel in much distress of mind.

She had gotten herself into a difficulty, and saw no easy way of escape as long as she held to her determination to discover Florian. To it she was bound to hold in spite of fate, confident that her old luck would not desert her. But matters had a gloomy look, and her orders to the landlord that she be taken to the depot for the night train was a sort of submission to fate which might not come amiss later. Sitting in the shabby hotel parlor, idly touching the keys of the consumptive piano, to her entered Paul Rossiter. He was not aware of her presence. A glad sparkle lit up her eyes at sight of him. Here was a chance to attain her object, here was an opportunity to stab Ruth Pendleton to the heart.

"Mr. Rossiter—O Mr. Rossiter! is it really you?"

"It is, Mrs. Merrion and I am delighted to meet you."

"And where is Florian—Mr. Wallace? Why are you in the same town and not together!"

"I suppose he is loafing on his island still," said the thoughtless poet. "He spends most of his time there and rarely comes to the village. And may I ask what fate has cast you at this unhappy season on the shores of the St. Lawrence?"

"My native place receives me at any time."

"Ah! your native place!"

"You, I suppose, are soon to make your home here?"

"I return to New York in a week, Mrs. Merrion."

"Where you are hopelessly unknown by this time, as most people think you have drowned yourself. And is Ruth to go with you?"

"Ruth!" stammered the poet. "Do you mean Miss Pendleton? I have not addressed her twice since I came to the town. For a long time I was not aware she had left her convent."

"And yet she left the convent for your sake." He flushed a little, ignorant as he was of the motive of her boldness. She had, as she thought, an opportunity for belittling Ruth, and if the poet could not suspect it he could feel an uneasiness at her frank communications.

"Do you remember a bit of bristol-board," she continued, "scribbled upon by you in the convent-grounds last year?"

He did remember something of the sort.

"It was found and given to Ruth. Romantic, wasn't it? They could no longer hold her in the convent. 'She went by hill, she went by dale,' until she came to me in the city, showed me the card, and implored me to aid her in finding you. When you were not to be found she was nearly frantic, and fled to the seclusion of Clayburgh to hide her grief. Worse than a convent, isn't it? And I thought you had settled the matter, and would take Ruth with you to the city! Well, there's bashfulness for you! And so, Flo—Mr. Wallace is on the island. Which island, I'd like to know?"

"Solitary Island I think they call it," said Paul, absently, his whole body hot with mingled feelings of shame and delight. But he added, "I have heard that he returns to New York in the morning."

"Thank heaven," murmured Barbara, "I shall be there ahead of him."

Paul went out into the open air in a daze of happi-

ness,—Ruth loved him; his fate was no longer uncertain, but he was sorry that her tender secret had found a resting-place in Barbara's bosom. He could not see the motives of the latter's coarse revelation of it to him. He was sure, however, that malice prompted both the coarseness and the revelation, and he had a dim suspicion that something might have happened since Barbara's arrival in town to bring it to pass. Perhaps Ruth knew and dreaded that Barbara would do something of the kind. How could she ever look in his face again, suspecting that Barbara had so ruthlessly exposed her? The more the poet looked at the matter the stronger his suspicions grew, and alongside them grew the determination to leave Clayburgh that night as quietly as he had entered it months before. Ruth would then feel easier. In time he could come himself to press the suit in which he had altogether despaired; and if it was hard to forbear flying to her then and soliciting a surrender of the secret which rightfully belonged to him, its compensation was that the delicacy of his wife-to-be would not be so cruelly injured. She loved him and had sought for him and was grieved at his absence. He did not want more; but he walked near the house just after twilight, and saw her sitting at one side of the parlor table, with the Squire at the other, her calm, peaceful face as sweet in its repose as if the nun's veil hung about it.

Barbara was on the train with him that night, but he discreetly kept out of her way. He had yet to learn of her engagement to Florian, of the injury done to Frances by the hermit's proud son.

The story would have spoiled his journey. He had some respect still for Florian, enough to pity him. Very little the great man cared either for his pity or his respect.

In the whirlpool of city life again! Paul realized it with a sense of delight as unexpected as it was pleasant; for he had never a great love towards the metropolis, and his many sorrows there had embittered him against it forever. Not quite forever, as he now felt. He had the secret of his misfortunes in his grasp, and nevermore could Russian spies go about whispering slanders and bribing the managers of theaters because of his likeness to the Prince of Cracow. There was a fair field before him. A few months' absence had banished the mists that once hung round him. One manager was glad to have him back, and another, and a third. In fact, a few calls in the course of the day filled the poet with inordinate vanity.

Peter Carter received him in a commonplace attic with tears and embraces, and spent a luxurious hour describing the perfidy of Florian, the woes of Frances, and the cruelty of madame, who had driven him forth into the world without mercy and without allowance. He drank too much, or perhaps too fast for perfect and easy narration, and fell to snoring before all the details,—worthy indeed of his fame—were given to Rossiter. The poet marveled greatly at the antics the city had played during his brief absence, and went to his old quarters with some haste and anxiety.

Madame De Ponsonby Lynch gave him a generous welcome. She was still madame, reserved,

exclusive, and good-hearted, and very handsomely apologized for her treatment of him; nor did the faintest trace of feeling appear on her smooth face at mention of an incident which brought her exiled lord to her mind. Frances, she said, was probably about the house somewhere—most likely in the famous attic which he had so queerly deserted—and she begged him not to be surprised at anything in the young lady's manner or appearance for she had lately met with a severe disappointment. The disappointment he had probably heard of, since it was, in a quiet way, the talk of metropolitan society. The poet, after engaging his old attic, climbed the stairs to look for Frances. There was a burning indignation in his breast against the heartlessness of the man who could inflict so cruel an insult on a woman so gentle and good as his promised wife.

She came to the door in answer to his knock, and for a few seconds there was a hush of astonishment as the two met face to face. "Mr. Rossiter, or his ghost!" she exclaimed.

"And the substantial Miss Lynch," said he, offering his hand. "I have engaged the garret for a long term, and am not likely to lose it by any more misunderstandings."

"How can I ever——"

"Your mother has done it; don't say a word."

"And my poor father, that made all the disturbance——"

"I just came from him," said Paul, smiling, "so do not let bygones trouble you. I know you have enough of unhappiness."

Her lip trembled and she could not trust herself



to speak. While talking the poet took a quick inventory of the changes sorrow had made in her. She was still the gentle, sprightly girl of a year past, but his eye noted the trembling lip, the melancholy shadows around the mouth and eyes, and the nervousness of her manner.

"I have seen him so late as yesterday," Paul said, "and I thought you ought to know. There have been so many strange things happening in his life. I was in Clayburgh, and he was there. He discovered his father in the person of an old fisherman that he had known for years. Think of it—a prince of royal blood, with a Yankee dialect and a Yankee look, leading a solitary life on an island of the St. Lawrence!"

"I am so glad," said Frances; "his happiness will now be complete."

"I suppose," the poet said cynically, but recollected himself in time. "Alas! Frank, there never was a more unhappy meeting of father and son. The father was dead, shot fatally by a sneaking assassin, and it was only a corpse which death handed to Florian."

"Oh!" she murmured, with clasped hands, and the tears began to fall.

"I think it was a punishment on him," said Paul calmly. "No, don't look at me so. We only buried the Prince two weeks ago, and in telling you all about him I must say some hard things of Florian. You know I met Florian's father by a mere accident. He took me into his cabin, made a favorite of me, and let in some light not only on his own life but on mine. Florian was unworthy of him. He deserved

to lose him, and to lose him as he did, for he died as much from a broken heart as from a bullet-wound. I wanted Florian to know that, but he suspected me and kept away."

"Paul," said she, through her sympathetic tears, "what has he ever done to you that you should talk of him so?"

"Nothing more than he has done to any true man in his treatment of you. God sent him one punishment, and he got no sense or grace from it. I doubt very much if he will gain anything from another. So you all thought I had committed suicide?"

That remark brought the smiles to her face.

"Well, you know what a despairing poet is apt to do," she replied. "But we hoped you had merely changed your residence. Let me ask you, did you meet in Clayburgh that lovely Ruth Pendleton?"

It was more than the poet could do to keep the blood from his fair face. It rose to his collar, over it, to his ears, to his eyes, to the roots of his hair, nor could his glib chatter hide it from her eyes.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### TERRIBLE TRUTH.

FLORIAN resumed professional labors with a zest somewhat keen after his long confinement on Solitary Island. It had been a trying time for him, but he had come out of those hard circumstances a victor. They had left little trace on him, and he had put the incident of his father's death out of his life as thoroughly as the death of his sister, the loss of Ruth, and the late election. Life's busy round was gone over as evenly and as hopefully as if these tragedies had never been. Yet he could not deny that his real self had been held up to him in the quiet of his late retreat more minutely than at any time in the last ten years. He had even come close to admitting the truth of the portrait which nature's mirror presented to him. But it was a little too ghastly for truth, he thought, and he put off an inspection of it until such time as his discerning mind had recovered its nice balance. When that time came he had forgotten it. He had to admit to himself that these sad events threw a shadow long enough to reach the pleasantest of his days. They were shelved, indeed, but not annihilated. He was human after all, he said, when a protracted period of restlessness troubled him. With another man it would have been the "blues" or lonesomeness ; with

him it was an indigestion, or a phenomenon independent of the will. He bore it as he bore a rainy day or a vexatious lawsuit. There would be an end to it some time. A calm, steady glance on the road ahead was enough to neutralize the effect of depression.

It could not be said that he had a habit of dreaming in daylight. In studying a political or legal problem he occasionally wandered into unpractical speculations on the incidents or personages of a suit. Not often. Nowadays he fell into a habit of reviewing events connected with his father's mournful history, and of studying those points at which his own and Linda's life had come in contact with the life of the solitary prince. These reveries had always one unvarying conclusion. Over his face passed that expression of anguish which twisted the body like the rack, and which had attacked him many times on the island. He blamed the pictures and mementoes in his room for this weakness. There was the painting of the yacht and a score of pretty things belonging to that former time. A glimpse of any one of them disturbed him, but he had not the heart to put them away. He was content to wait the time when all these things would stand in his memory like distant mountains wrapped in a heavenly mist. He had lost none of his political standing by his defeat, and the Senate was open to him. He had resolved to accept the office. It would be a very quiet affair, and its dullness would be a safe refuge for a vessel without any definite harbor. His love affairs were not going smoothly.

Barbara was acting oddly. He had said to her a

few short, polite words on the general character of her Clayburgh visit which were certain to put an end to escapades of that sort. She had a stock of other annoyances, however, and dealt them out carelessly. At an assembly she had chatted much with Rossiter and the Count in turn. When he gave her his impressive reasons why she should do these things no more, she had laughed at him and done them again. Finally the climax was capped when he encountered the insidious Russian in Barbara's reception-room. It was certainly an odd thing for Florian to show his feeling strongly, but he did so on this occasion. His face paled slightly and a light sweat burst out on his forehead, while his hands hanging at his side shook as if with ague. He stood in the doorway, unable to do more for an instant, his eyes fixed on the Count with an expression which frightened Barbara into a faint scream. Vladimir smiled with deep satisfaction, and, bowing politely to the lady, bade her good-morning and withdrew. The scream brought Florian to his senses, and Barbara's pretty and anxious inquiries were met with his usual self-possession.

"My dear," said he—and the little lady recognized the tone very well; it always reminded her of the late visit to Clayburgh—"the Count is obnoxious to me for the best of reasons. I do not wish to see you and him together again on any occasion. As for coming to your house, it must be his last visit."

"And you were *such* friends!" pouted she. "But I don't care two pins for him, and I think it annoys him so to see us together. You are just a little, a

very little, hard, Flory. Confess, now, are you not?"

"Not hard enough for him," the great man said savagely, "there is so much of the devil in him."

Barbara was both curious and venturesome. What was the secret of their mutual dislike? It was something more than mere jealousy, and she would like to know it. Until she found out the cause her intentions were to keep on terms with the Count. It would require caution and secrecy. What of that? She was too clever to be caught by such a mass of dignity as her beloved Florian, who was unacquainted with short cuts in life's path, would not take them if he were, and fancied his promised wife fashioned after his own ideas. Barbara and the Count became quite friendly once more on the understanding that he was to keep out of Florian's way. Every art known to the fair widow was used to win from the Count the secret of his broken relations with Florian—which he never told, of course, but amused and revenged himself instead by filling Barbara's mind with wild longings for the title and grandeur to which Florian had so lately resigned the right. He made her believe that these things could yet be obtained, and, by picturing the glories of the Russian court, made the life of a senator's wife in Washington appear by contrast tedious. The astute Barbara was caught fast in the trap, and from that moment Florian was beset with artifices and entreaties. A significant incident put a sudden end to her ambition.

"Florian," she said one day as her eagerness burst bounds, "do try to win your title. We were not

made for this horrid, homespun American life. I shall just die thinking of what might have been, if you do not make the attempt at least."

He mistook her eagerness for satire and showed her a caseknife.

"Take that," said he, "and stab me to the heart. It is as well do it now as to wait for a Russian spy to do it for you."

She looked at him and the knife for a few moments until the meaning broke upon her mind and with it the full malice of the Count's suggestions.

"Do you suppose, my dear," he said, amused at her astonishment, "that if there were a chance of obtaining my title and estates I would hesitate? I got what was possible, and with that we must be satisfied. An American prince is an oddity. Let us enjoy what glory we may from it."

"Hard fortune, my prince," she replied with a bitter sob. He was troubled no more with these longings. Barbara did not, however, give up her pleasant dealings with the Count. She enjoyed a petty revenge upon him by allowing him to continue his lectures on the glories of the Russian court, and in return described to him imaginary scenes with Florian in which the latter, for patriotic motives, utterly refused to leave America. It did not take the shrewd Russian long to discover that she was playing with him. Was he always to be the sport of this woman and the politician?

"You are a clever inventor," he said one evening, "and I see that you have discovered me. You are bound to remain in politics, Yankee politics, when it lies in your power to enjoy the refined pleasures

of a civilized court. There is no accounting for tastes."

"Is Florian any the less a prince in America?" she asked. "According to your doctrines his blood is as blue and his title as good as any in Europe. With that I am satisfied."

"Always Florian," he said, unable to hide his fiery jealousy. "If you should lose this manly paragon, what then?"

"If!" And she laughed in her exasperating way.

"You are playing with fire, dear lady. You do not know me. I have not given you up. I never will. I can destroy him in a breath, and if you do not take care I *will* destroy him. My mother's prayers have kept me from nothing so far, and I do not suppose they are yet more powerful."

"You are charming, Count, when you talk and look like that. How many times have you made the same protestations?"

"Believe me, never before. Barbara, Barbara, you are——"

"There, there, Count do not be unfair. I know all that you would tell me and sincerely believe it. Let us talk of something—well, interesting."

He ground his teeth in silence and asked himself how much longer he would be the scorn of this butterfly.

"If the door opened now to admit your Florian——"

"Always Florian," she interrupted reproachfully.

"In what a position you would be after his commands to you concerning my visits!"

"But he will not open the door, and if he did you



would not be found here. The window, these curtains, your honor—what a number of happy circumstances I trust to !”

“Pshaw! what is the matter with me? I have never allowed myself to be led by a string so with any woman. And my hand holding the winning card! One word and Florian would look on you with horror. What is the matter with me that I do not utter it?”

“The matter with you, Count,” said she, looking at her watch to hide a faint apprehension, “is that you have stayed too long. Now take yourself off while the door is open to you, or you may have to go by the window.”

“One word, one little word,” said the Count, half to himself, “and you are assured to me. I swear my belief that Florian would never wish to see your face again.”

“If you will not go,” she said, rising, with a trembling voice, “I must leave you. You have always treated me with honor——”

“And I am bound so to treat you always,” he exclaimed, at once jumping to his feet. “You shall not be compromised on my account, even to satisfy my hate for your lover. My time will come, and this hand which now I embrace—will you permit me——” He kissed her hand while she stood laughing at his foolish devotion; and this was the tableau which greeted the cold, steady gaze of Florian entering at that moment by the softly-opening door. There was an awkward pause. Barbara grew pale to the last degree of pallor, and the Count felt a thrill of delight leap along his veins. The great

man alone was equal to the occasion, for he strode into the room as if nothing had happened, and made his politest bow to the two guilty ones. The Count took his hat and retired towards the door until Florian detained him.

"You may leave here with a wrong impression of my relations to Mrs. Merrion," he said, as blandly as was possible, "which I wish to correct. I once presented her to you as my promised wife. It was a pleasantry which now merits explanation. The lady herself will assure you that henceforth she is less to me than to you or any other man."

The Count bowed with a sardonic smile, but Barbara rushed to Florian and threw both her arms about him amid a storm of sobs.

"He threatened you, Florian!" she cried. "He said you were in his power. I did it for your sake. Oh! do not be cruel, do not be hasty. A little time, my love—time, time, time."

Florian was staggered out of his stoical calm by this plausible explanation, and looked at the Count inquiringly.

"It is true," said the latter proudly, "and if you will come with me I can show you the truth of what Madame is pleased to assert of me."

"I will go," said Florian in a voice which made her heart quake.

"Remember, sir, that the truth will bring a heavy penalty on your head."

"You must not go to-night, Florian," she sobbed—"oh! not to-night, my dearest. Wait until you are recollected. Appearances are against you and me, and this man is your sworn enemy."

He flung her off almost rudely.

"You are under suspicion also," he said in that same awful voice, the voice of suppressed rage or fear. "Be silent until I come again. Not a word!"

She fell back among her cushions as the door closed on the two men and their footsteps died gradually away. The two rivals in the affections of Barbara lost no time in reaching the luxurious quarters of the Count. Each raged with sincere hatred of the other, and each was sufficiently destitute of principle to use any means to compass the other's destruction. The successful rival saw his success smirched and befouled by his jealous opponent. The Count could not forgive the deception practiced on him, and, thoroughly unscrupulous, had little pity for the deceiver. With courage and bitterness they sat down to their weighty conversation. The Count having the advantage, could afford to be slow and sarcastic.

"An odd change this," he said, "for us who were friends."

"Spare your sentiment," Florian replied, "and come to the point. And let us understand each other. You said I was in your power, and you used that assertion to intrude yourself on my promised wife. I do not think the first true, and the second merits a punishment which you shall certainly receive—on conditions."

"A capital phrase—on conditions," sneered the Count. "There are many conditions, then, why I shall never receive the merited punishment. First of all, Madame Merrion is clever. I never made use of any threats to induce her to receive me. She has permitted my visits, secretly, of course, since you

forbade her the pleasure of my company. At my instigation she urged you to make an attempt to regain the title you lately sold. She does not care for me as she does for you, I know. You out of the way, I foresee what would happen. Of course I have left no means untried to put you out of the way. This interview is one of them. It is my trump card."

He looked into Florian's set face with the old, gay, devilish look that the great man had often admired. There was anything but admiration in his soul then. Even the Count awed a little under the intense purpose expressed in his frowning face.

"Your father is dead," he said suddenly. "I know *that*, you see, and also who did it. Have you never suspected?"

"Your spy," said Florian, with a shudder and a groan.

"He sent the bullet," the Count said, "obeying in that another's will. But there were circumstances, remote and proximate, which led to the crime. I mean, have you never suspected *them*?"

"Is that the secret of your power?" asked Florian, shading his face for an instant to hide its contortions of pain and horror. His voice was very low and quavering, almost pitiful. From that moment until the Count had finished speaking he uttered not a word.

"Ah! you do suspect it," said the Count wickedly, "and you see I do not spare you. But you have not gone into the secret so deeply as I. You and I, my Florian, are a dangerous and bad pair. The prayers of your father and my mother have only made us worse, and it is lucky that our faces and wills are

set toward the—well, best not to mention it, perhaps.”

Florian said nothing when he paused. He was listening like one in a terrible dream for the sole point of this discourse which concerned him.

“I will do you the honor of believing that had you foreseen the tragedy to spring from your manner of life for years past you would have changed it. I would not, I fear. You might not, for your ambition has always been strong enough to blind you to truth and right. Pardon me for moralizing, but I wish you to understand me fully. You are a man I have never trusted since I knew you, and never could trust you. Had you not dropped your faith”—Florian started as if struck—“to become a politician it would have been different. With a man who has once been a firm Catholic it is dangerous to deal. You went looking for your father; so did we. You were afraid to find him: we were also, or at least I was, for I foresaw his taking off. You were afraid his appearance would lose to you the title-sale money. The motives of each of us compare to the son’s disadvantage, do they not?”

It was of little use for Vladimir to fix his mocking eyes on the averted face. The great man, face to face with the specter which had so long stood at his side, had only its horrid features in his gaze.

“Well, you begin to comprehend, my Florian; you begin to recognize your own soul in this mirror of mine. You were false to a son’s instincts because of your ambition; you were false to a lover’s instincts because of your passion. What folly it was to expect you would be faithful to your friend when

he stood in your way ! You fooled us all very cunningly—alas ! only in the end to shame yourself. You left your princely father exposed to the bullet of the assassin when a little honesty and patience would have saved him. How could you suppose I, the libertine, the unprincipled one, would bear your insults in quiet ? We continued to look for the father you deserted, and we found him. Your ambition left him exposed to our fury. But I was merciful. I had no taste for blood, for the blood of an unfortunate, a countryman, a co-religionist, my friend's father. I would have saved him but for you."

Again the great man started, and his face, hidden from the Count, was twisted shapeless from that inward agony. The Russian's face had assumed a stern, malignant expression as he bent his fierce eyes on his foe and sometime friend. The last words he uttered as one would thrust the knife into a man's heart.

"I would have saved him but for you. You left the honored woman whom you had solemnly promised to marry, to deprive me of the one woman of my life—a woman far below your standard, hypocritical, but charming ; a woman to further your ambitions, but not to be the mother of Catholic children. As your desire for money exposed your father to danger, so your desire for this woman destroyed him. You remember that day which revealed to me your love for Barbara Merrion—a selfish, cruel love, doing no honor even to her. How you triumphed over me ! You sent me home mad ! I shall never forget that day on which I sealed my own damnation, if there

be damnation, because of you! The spy had found your father! What shall I do with him? he asked; and I said, Kill him!"

There was still no need to look at Florian, now plunged into the depths of shame and agony. He uttered no moan even! Outside there was a roll of carriage wheels, and presently the servant was knocking at the door with Paul's card. The Count read it, and upon second thought declined to see the gentleman, but the poet was already in the room making his apologies. One look at Florian convinced him that he had come too late.

"There is no need for me to say anything, Count," he explained, "since I see you have done the mischief I wished to prevent."

The Russian smiled, although he too was pale from emotion and triumph. He rejoiced in his success, in the humiliation of his rival, in the joy of once more possessing Barbara, even if it had been accomplished through a dreadful crime. Low as Florian was, he was yet a degree lower. He whispered his last accusing words in the great man's ear with something like a laugh.

"The bullet of Nicholas slew your father, and I permitted it; but you—you——" He broke off abruptly and turned to Paul, his hateful feelings almost bursting from his worn, evil face, his finger pointed at Florian.

"Behold the murderer of his father!" he cried.

Florian rose and his face came into the light. A dumb animal would have pitied its woe, and the poet gave a cry of anger and sorrow which the politician did not hear. He bowed mechanically to the two

and walked out gravely and steadily as a man proudly going to execution.

"If I were his friend, sir," the poet said in his simple, truthful way, "or had the slightest claim upon him, I would feel happy in the right to punish you for what you have done."

"Mr. Rossiter," replied the Russian courteously, "I would be sorry if you had a claim. He deserves no pity. It will do him good, the knowledge which he has of himself. You will excuse me."

He offered his hand, which the poet did not take, and the look which he cast at the shapely member, as if he saw its bloody stain, brought an instant's flush to the brazen cheek. Paul went out to his carriage, and as he entered it he heard the gay voice of Vladimir humming a joyous tune.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE HIDDEN LIFE.

ROSSITER's presence in the Count's chambers was the result of an hysteric appeal from Barbara, who fled to him in despair the moment the door closed on her angry lovers. It took some time to get the necessary explanations from her, and then Rossiter was only too eager to find the two rivals, before either could do mischief to the other. His failure did not at first sight threaten serious consequences, until he had time to reflect on the details of the painful scene. He had never seen any human being so affected by horror as Florian had been. He grew apprehensive over it, and on his return, after dismissing the now quieted Barbara, communicated his apprehensions to Frances.

"I am troubled for his sake as well as yours," he said, and the kindly words brought a smile to her lips. "He has heard what I threatened to tell him, from no very gentle lips, and he looked when he left us as if his heart had been cruelly wrung. I do not know if the truth will make him ill or bring him to his senses. It is better that he should know it perhaps. I shall watch him and keep guard over him for your sake and his father's until any possible danger is passed."

She thanked him gently. The poet climbed to his attic, sadly haunted by Florian's despairing face.

"That time truth struck home," said he to himself, "and pretty sharply. If it does not drive him to any extreme it may have a healthy effect on him. But his eyes looked bad."

He did not like to utter the thoughts which troubled him. Florian's mental balance was remarkable, but the events of a few months past were of a kind to shake the reason of strong souls. Neither Florian nor Barbara was to be seen the next day nor the day after, nor the third day. The papers had a curious rumor then of a sudden departure for Europe of the accomplished Barbara and a well-known attaché of the Russian embassy, but Paul would not believe it until a perfumed note in Barbara's handwriting reached him. Every one seemed to make him their confidant.

"DEAR MR. ROSSITER :

"Try to believe everything people say of me in the next two weeks. My word for it, it is all true. I was married to Count Behrenski this morning. He convinced me it was all over between me and Florian, and it almost broke my heart to know it, but it did not cloud my senses to my own advantages. I am a Russian, at all events. I wish you luck in your love-affair. *Au revoir !*

"BARBARA, COUNTESS BEHRENSKI."

The news of Mrs. Merrion's departure in the rôle of countess, after exciting the usual wonder of the

town, settled out of sight. It did not reflect on Florian, whose broken engagement to the widow was not known; and still it would have mattered little to him, under present circumstances, if that disgrace had been flung upon him. He was not to be found in his office or in his boarding-house, but, with his usual careful foresight, he had left written instructions for his clerk, without hinting at any date of return. Paul grew more and more uneasy when a week had passed and there was no news of him. Frances, with her wistful eyes and a dread in her face which he alone understood, came to him daily for information. That he could not give it frightened both, and vainly the poet cudgelled his brains to discover some clue to Florian's motives for suddenly disappearing. Had he gone to the island? What could bring him there in the dreary days of March? If he were repentant——

"There, that will do," said the poet; "that's not a sensible thought, and I don't know as I've had any sensible thoughts about this whole matter. I think I'll turn to the unexpected for a change."

"What can we do?" was Frances' daily cry.

"I can go to Clayburgh," he said, almost with a blush. "I have a silly idea that perhaps a great misfortune has made him penitent, and he has gone to do penance over his father's grave."

"That is it," said Frances eagerly. "I knew it would come to that. Mercy is not beyond him, Paul. Oh! go, like his good angel."

"I feel it is a nonsensical thing to do," said he, "but I suppose it must be done. And if I find him, and everything should be favorable, what could we

say to him about—well, your mother and father, for instance?"

He examined the paper on the wall attentively, while she looked at him with a puzzled face.

"If he is safe, that is enough," she answered simply.

"Well, let it go," said Paul, smiling. "He doesn't care very much for any of us, I fear, much as we are interested in him. And, Frank, as long as you live let no one know that I made myself such a goose for your sake and his father's."

Rossiter slipped into Clayburgh without exciting attention. He found a close-mouthed fisherman after a few minutes' search, who for a reasonable sum agreed not only to take him to Solitary Island, but also to keep his mouth shut about it until eternity, and the journey was made in successful secrecy. Arrived at a spot overlooking the well-known cabin, Paul dismissed his guide and crossed the ice on foot to the opposite shore. It was now midnight. The lonely island lay three feet beneath the snow, singularly tranquil under the dim stars. A faint wind added to the gentle loneliness, and, stirring the trees on the hill, brought Paul's eyes to the grave beneath them. No light or sign of human presence anywhere! No tracks in the snow save his own until he reached the cabin-door; there began a pathway which led down the slope and up the opposite hill to the grave—the path marked out by the funeral procession! Even while he looked a figure came staggering from the grave along the path to where he stood, a figure stooped, uncertain in its gait, moaning, and stopping rarely to swing its arms upwards in potent

despair. Paul trembled with dread, and the tears sprang to his eyes. Was he to find the mental wreck he had once pictured? Florian gave no sign of surprise when he saw him, but adopted at once his usual reserve. He was not insane.

"You here?" he said calmly, but the voice quavered. "I believe you were there *that* night, and I remember you said you had a message for me. Will you come in if you care to?"

A cheerful fire burned in the hearth of the single room and the tallow candle showed Izaak Walton in his usual place, with every other circumstance of the room undisturbed. Paul said nothing until he had scanned his old friend keenly. The great man sat down before the fire placidly and submitted to the inspection with an indifference so like his father's own that Paul drew a breath of delight. In ten days he had changed wofully. His clothes hung upon shrunken limbs, and his face was wasted. Hollow cheeks, hollow, burning eyes, and wide nostrils! The hand which rested on the favorite book showed its cords and veins, the shoulders were rounded, and his whole attitude one of physical exhaustion. The tears again sprang to the poet's eyes. Here was a penitent surely, and there was something boyish or childish about him that appealed to the heart wonderfully, as if misfortune had stripped him of all the years since boyhood, and all his honors.

"I have a message for you," the poet said, "but, with your permission, I'll put it off till to-morrow. I am going to remain here for to-night with your permission also."

"Oh! certainly," Florian replied, in the same uncertain voice; "there is a good room yonder where he slept. You can have the bed. Have you had supper?"

"I would like something to eat," the poet said out of curiosity. Florian took down a loaf of bread from the cupboard, poured some water into a cup, and sat down again without any apology for the scanty fare—just as his father would have done. Paul ate a slice or two of the bread and drank the water, while a pleasant silence held the room. He did not know how to open a conversation.

"This was his favorite book," said he, touching Izaak Walton tenderly, "I remember often to have seen him reading it in this room."

"Yes," said Florian, with interest, "and it is one of my memories of him. I was very unfortunate in not knowing more of him. The world fooled me out of that treasure—and of many another," he added partly to himself. Paul was surprised more and more. This pleasant, natural manner of speaking offered an odd contrast to his woebegone looks. It was something like the Florian of years past. He deliberated whether it would not be better to defer his communication until he understood his motives better.

"I came from New York to-night," he ventured to say. "I was anxious about you, and so were others."

"There was no need to be anxious," said Florian cheerfully. "I am quite happy here. It is a pleasant residence winter and summer. I shall never regret the city, which will certainly not regret me."

"You may not have heard of Mrs. Merrion," Paul remarked helplessly, so astounded was he by the last remark.

"No," said the other without curiosity. "Some scandal connected with a Count Behrenski, probably."

"No. She married him and went to Europe last week quietly." And after that the poet said no more, for he was in a maze and knew not what to think or do.

"I shall retire now, with your permission, Florian," he said finally, using the old familiar name. "I hope I am not troubling you too much or driving you from your own bed."

"Not at all, Rossiter, not at all. I never sleep there. Good-night; and if you should not find me in the morning have no uneasiness. I shall turn up again assuredly."

Paul fell asleep without settling the vexed questions which Florian's odd manner and words suggested. The great man, left to himself, behaved in a simple matter-of-fact fashion at once pathetic and amusing. He snuffed the candle with a face as earnest as if snuffing candles was the one duty of his life, put away the remnants of Paul's supper carefully after washing the cup and drying it neatly, stirred the fire, opened much-handled Izaak, and settled himself for a quiet hour's reading. Ten days had fixed him in the Solitary's groove as firmly as if he had been in it for years. On the night of Vladimir's revelation he had driven to his own apartments in a state of mind not to be described. He had long suspected his own share in his father's death, but

the lurid color in which Vladimir painted his guilt was a fearful shock to him. He fled from the Count in a sort of daze which his firm will could not dispel, and it seemed to him that madness or delirium was prevented only by the persistency with which he beat off the tumultuous thoughts that crowded upon him. His self-possession was entirely gone. The life which he had led, the ambitions which he had cherished, the woman whom he had loved, all circumstances connected with his father's death, filled him with wild horror when he recalled them. He could not think of anything with method. He could only feel, and his feelings threatened to drive him into insanity, so sharp, so bitter were they, so confused yet active.

It was instinct more than reason which sent him to Solitary Island. It was a mechanical effort of the will which produced the instructions for his clerk; but once on the journey, with people moving about him, and scene after scene bringing peace to his distracted mind, Florian was able to cry like a child hour by hour of his sorrowful flight. He scarcely knew why he wept, unless to ease the burden pressing upon his heart, which seemed to flow away with his tears. Like Paul, he reached Clayburgh in the night, and unseen fled away on foot across the ice over the well-known course which he and Ruth and Linda had often taken in the yacht; past Round Island with a single light for the ice-waste, leaving Grindstone to the left as he ran along the narrow strait with two islands rising on each side of him like the walls of a coffin; through the woods to the spot overlooking the old cabin; across



the bay and up the slope to the lonely grave on the summit, where he cast himself with a long, sad cry of grief and despair.

Five days passed before anything like calm and systematic thought returned to him. One idea stood before him like an inhabitant of the island, with a personality of its own—the words of the Count: “Behold the murderer of his father!” He muttered the accusing words many times in the day and night, sitting on the grave, regardless of the cold and whispering them to himself; weeping, sobbing, raving, moaning, silent by times, as the fit took him; never sleeping two hours at a time; haunted always by a dreadful fear of divine or human vengeance. Phantoms of past incidents and people were floating around him sleeping and waking, causing him constant alarm. Even the sweet face of Linda frowned upon him, and that was hardest of all to bear. At the close of the fifth day his delirium suddenly left him and he enjoyed a long and refreshing sleep. When he woke the hideous nightmare of sorrow and remorse and dread had vanished. He was himself again, but not the self which had flitted from New York to hide its anguish in the icy solitude. There was another Florian born of that long travail, and a better Florian than the world had yet known.

He was not aware of any change. He had lost his habit of self-consciousness, and he was to become aware of what was working within him only when others pointed it out to him. Kneeling in the snow at the foot of the grave, he said his morning prayers, promising the father of his love that never again would he have occasion to grieve for him, and that

what man could do to atone for murder he, with the help of God, would do. His breakfast he made on fresh fish and meal found in the larder, traveling many miles that day in the snow to obtain flour and meal and necessities at a distant village. He was very weak, but it troubled him not at all. He had no regard for his own sufferings, so firmly were his eyes fixed on the martyrdom his father endured for his sake. Every available moment found him at the grave in deep thought or prayer. The priest of an obscure village heard with wonder his strange confession of ten years of life, marveling what manner of man this man could be; and his Communion was simple and fervent, as became a penitent. Thus began the eighth day, and at its close he was sitting calmly before the log-fire in the kitchen, and Izaak Walton was in his hands.

What was he going to do? His period of uncontrolled grief was over and his long penance begun. Where was it to end? He had many injuries to repair—his scandalous life, his rejection of Frances, his treatment of all his friends. Not for one moment did he think of returning to the city or to public life. He saw clearly the precipice from which Providence, by means of great misfortunes, had snatched him. He had entered the great city a pure-hearted boy to whom sin was almost unknown, whose one desire was to preserve the faith, in spirit and in word, incorrupt in himself. How gradually and how surely he fell! Careless intercourse with all sorts of people and the careless reading of all sorts of books, with the adoption of all sorts of theories and ideas, brought upon him an intellectual sensuality only too

common and too little noticed in the world. Then came the loose thought and the loose glance and the loose word, the more than indifferent companions, the dangerous witticism, the state which weakened faith and practice, and prepared the soul for its plunge into the mud. Thank God! he had escaped the mud, at least. But who had saved him? And was he to go back to it all? "There are some men whom politics will damn." Wise words for him, at whom they seemed to point. What was he to do? He thought over it that night and the next morning. His resolution formed itself slowly; finally it was made. He would take his father's place on the island, and remain there until death released him from his penance. Was it a hard thing to do? No, he said, not with the graves of father and sister so near him. And thus was he situated when Paul found him.

The poet made his morning meal in silence and constraint. It reminded him forcibly of many meals he had eaten in the same room while sharing the hermit's hospitality. The circumstances were little changed. Although the day was cold, the sun shone through the red-curtained window with a summer brightness, the log-fire glowed in the hearth, the savory smell of broiled fish pervaded the little room, and Florian, a wonderful likeness of his father, sat eating sparingly, silent but not gloomy, save for the sad shadows occasionally flitting over his face. The contrast between the placid manner and the feverish countenance was odd, but not so forcible as the difference between this silent man and the ambitious politician. Paul gave up speculation as

a hopeless task, and rightly judging his present temper, plunged abruptly into the matter of his visit.

"You may be aware of the circumstances which led to my stay on Solitary Island," said he for a beginning. Florian regarded him placidly, without a trace of the old feeling in his looks. Paul thought it pretense; but it was real. The great man had no feeling towards him.

"I am not aware of them," he replied.

"Strangely enough, our resemblance was the cause of it," said Paul. "The spy, who pursued you because of your resemblance to your own family, pursued me for the same reason, drove me out of all employment and, with the aid of injudicious friends, brought me to the verge of poverty and death. Your father saved me, and, for reasons quite plain to us both, took me in and earned my everlasting gratitude for himself and his son."

A faint flush spread over Florian's face in the pause that followed.

"I must ask your pardon," he said humbly, "for my guilty share in your sufferings. I was your friend, and I should have aided you; but I was led to believe you stood between me and Ruth, and again between me and Frances Lynch. I was glad you suffered. I regret it sincerely now. I trust you will forgive me."

It was the poet's turn to blush at this humility.

"Don't mention it," said he. "Peter Carter was the cause of all these troubles. You are not to blame. I am not sorry for them. They brought me in contact with your father."

"And I hated you for that," Florian went on the same tone, "because your worthiness won a privilege which my crimes deprived me of. I spoke to you once under that impression in a manner most insulting. I ask——"

"Hold on!" said Paul, jumping to his feet with a red face. "No more of that, Florian. I cannot stand it. If you are really sincere in this change that has come over you keep your apologies for Frances and others. But I do not understand it. I expected something like this, but not so complete and astounding a revolution."

Florian offered no remonstrance to this blunt suspicion, but after a little pointed out to the grave with such a look in his face! then back to himself.

"Behold the murderer of his father," he said in a sudden burst of sobs, as he repeated the Count's telling words. "If I could apologize to *him* as I do to you, as I shall do to all the others. Alas! what humiliation is there greater than that?"

"He's on the right track," said the satisfied poet, wiping his eyes in sympathy and thinking joyfully of Frances.

"It's all cleared up between us, then, Flory," said he cheerfully, as he clasped the great man's hand. "My business is made the easier for that, and it will send me back to New York with a light heart. Come, I have some spots of interest to show you about the old house. Your father loved me, Flory. How proud I am of that honor! But, ah! not as he loved you, his son. I was his confidant in many things, and I have the secret of his life and the explanation of its oddities. Flory, your father

was a saint, of princely soul as well as princely birth."

He lifted a trap-door in the floor of the bedroom, and led the way, holding a lighted candle, into the cellar.

"It is not a cellar," he explained, flashing the light on the rocky walls, "but a cave. Here is a door concealed in the rock very nicely. We open it so. Now enter and here we are."

They could hear the sound of running water in the cave, but Florian paid it no attention. His eyes were fastened on the new discovery. A set of rude shelves took up one whole side of an almost square room, and was thickly crowded with books. The general character was devotional and mystical, but the classics were well represented, and astronomy and philosophy had the choicest volumes. A rough desk below contained a wooden carved crucifix, a few bits of manuscript, and writing materials. From a peg in its side hung a leather discipline, whose thongs were tipped with fine iron points. A few sacred prints hung on the walls. Florian knelt and kissed first the crucifix and then the discipline.

"This spot," said Paul reverently, "is a secret to all save you and me. When I first came here, broken down and disheartened—it seems a beautiful and fit sanctuary for the disheartened—I was sincerely disposed to lean more heavily on God for the support I needed. After a little the prince took me into his confidence, and I beheld such a sight"—the tears of emotion poured from his eyes—"as I had never dreamed of seeing this side of heaven. Long meditations and prayers, mortifications such as that

discipline hints at, unbounded charity for all men, are virtues common to all the saints. They did not impress me as did the glimpses of his soul which I received. Ah! such an overpowering love of God. It seemed to burn within him like a real flame and to illuminate the space about him as does this candle. I would have feared him but for the love and strength these very qualities gave me. I knelt here with him often, and when I was strong enough tried to stay by him in his vigils. I know the angels often came to him visibly. I saw wonders here and dreamed real dreams. And no one knew it save myself. Who would have believed it had they not seen what I saw?"

"Blind, blind, blind!" murmured Florian. "We all caught glimpses of his glory, but my love was not as sharp as hate, and my soul too low to look for such a manifestation of grace. My sin is all the greater."

"The last time I saw him," continued Paul, "was in this spot, kneeling where you are kneeling. He had a premonition of his coming passion, but it was lightened by the conviction—perhaps it had been revealed to him—that out of it would come your salvation. 'Tell my son,' he said, 'that I died because of him.'"

"Behold the murderer of his father," Florian murmured to himself.

"Tell him also not to despair, but with a good heart, and without haste or great grief for anything save for his sins, to begin his penance.' You see he knew; and when I asked him if he were about to die, 'God holds all our days,' said he, 'who knows but

this may be our last ?' I never saw him again in life. God rest his soul, if it has suffered any delay !"

There was again a short pause as Paul waited to review that last scene and to recall the tones, the feelings, the incidents of a most pathetic moment. Florian still knelt at the desk with his fingers about the discipline.

"Well, it is all over," he said to the kneeling figure ; "let us go. You notice the dry air of the cave. It is beautifully ventilated and very safe for such a place. Your father loved it. Come, my friend. Or do you wish to remain here ?"

Florian rose and they returned to the room above.

"I have finished my work—almost," said the poet, putting on his hat, "and now I am going. Can I be of any help to you ?"

"My father's friend and mine," Florian replied, "I have need only for your pardon and the renewal of that affection you once had for me."

"And never lost, Florian. You have it still, and the pardon which is always yours beforehand. After a little you will return to New York ?"

"Yes, after a little," he replied slowly, "but not to remain. Here is my home in the future. I have my business to close up and a great act of justice to perform. After that my solitude."

It was on the poet's lips to dissuade him from so extravagant a course, but he thought better of it and said nothing, preferring to leave so delicate and dangerous a matter to time and the good providence of God. Florian walked out with him as far as the opposite shore, a smile of joy lighting up oddly the sad lines of his face. He seemed, however, singu-



larly destitute of the power of self-reflection. His thoughts were ever fixed on what he had seen and heard of his father, without much attention to their effect on himself. He was smiling, not for joy, but in obedience to some hidden impulse which he did not think of analyzing.

"Why do you look so pleased?" said the poet to him.

"Do I look pleased?" he asked, with a puzzled expression which silenced the poet. They parted at the entrance to the woods.

"Until I see you again," said the poet, clasping his hand.

That was a miserable day for Ruth Pendleton which witnessed the vulgar outbursts of Barbara Merrion and showed to her the real character of the woman in whom she had confided. There was nothing to prevent her telling Ruth's story to the whole world; and in her heart there was the dread of its reaching Paul's ears, as it must if he remained long in the town, or if Barbara encountered him. She was compelled to believe that Paul thought no more of her than of any other woman, in spite of Barbara's gossip. His manner had always been cordial, respectful, and distant. He had never sought her out, and he so near; had never presumed to any of a lover's familiarity; had always been as distant as a polite acquaintance could be, and talked of New York and his visit to her convent as common things, which they were not to her. Was the bit of Bristol-board a fancy then? She looked at it many times a day. How it would amuse him when Barbara related its history! Her cheeks burned at the thought

of the humiliation. The Squire assured her that he had arranged it with Barbara nicely.

Ruth was fain to be satisfied, but could not trust Barbara until she heard that Paul had also departed from Clayburgh. It was a delicate and thoughful act on the poet's part, and well deserved its intended effect. Ruth rejoiced over it from one point of view. It was hardly probable that he had met Barbara. If so, and she had told him, there was no dread of meeting him again in this world. Her dream faded into the chill reality of day. Resignation was Ruth's stronghold, and she bore this sorrow as sweetly as she had borne many others in her placid life. The winter wore away, until blustering March began to hint at the warmth of spring. Then walking out one day she met at the postoffice Paul, hearty and loud from a consciousness of the happiness to come. It was :

"Miss Pendleton, are you not glad to see an old face to-day?" and "Mr. Rossiter, this is an unexpected pleasure," with bows and tremblings and heart-beats innumerable, and many inquiries about nothing at all, until Paul said :

"You may wonder at my return in this rough season, but I come on a matter that concerns us both."

"Had you not better wait?" she said politely, glancing around while inwardly she grew hot and cold from shame.

"I merely wished to give you a hint," he said, "of what you are to expect." Knowing the double meaning in his words he watched her confusion with secret delight. "The island has another solitary."

She cast a startled look at him.

"Florian has come back a penitent, thrown up the world and its honors, and proposes to live and die, as did his father, in the obscurity of that island."

"I am dazed," she replied; "I cannot understand such things."

"They are as true as they seem, Miss Pendleton. This evening I shall explain them. Florian is on the island, has been there for ten days, and Mrs. Merriion has married a Russian count and gone to Europe. You are still more surprised. Let me say good-day to you, and do me the honor of being at home this evening."

Ruth was again deceived. This visit concerned only Florian, she thought, and consequently there was no reason why she should fear that Barbara had exposed her. That night when Rossiter called talk drifted into the usual channels. Paul related the circumstances which had led to Florian's flight to the island, and gave Ruth a description of his experience with the penitent that morning.

"It is a wreck you have seen, not Florian," she said, with the tears in her eyes; "but out of it the old Florian will come back to us. Thank God! I hope Linda and the prince know this day of joy."

"It is quite impossible," said Paul, "that he should take up the life his father led. Yet it fits him wonderfully; and to see him you would think the prince was revived."

"We shall leave Père Rougevin to settle his future. He will make it easy for him to resume the old life without violence to the grace which he has received. I shall make bold to visit him to-morrow."

"I shall have the honor of accompanying you," said Paul, "if you have no objections. I am going to the Island myself. My two reasons for coming here were—I wished to make certain of what had happened to Florian for the sake of Frances."

"Poor girl!" said Ruth, "she will be his salvation yet."

"Indeed she will, Miss Pendleton. I believe his heart turns that way still. No great heart like his could ever find content in such a creature as Mrs. Merrion. And my other reason was to remove any misunderstanding between you and me."

"Misunderstanding!" said Ruth, greatly surprised.

"I have loved you a long time, Miss Pendleton—fully eight years. I have tried to keep it a secret, to bury it forever from your knowledge, and yet I could not. I could not leave you without having spoken. God knows if I might not have made a mistake in so doing! It would be an eternal regret to me, and so I wish to know from your own lips, Ruth, if I must part from you forever. It rests with you to give me the greatest happiness or the greatest sorrow of my life."

"I shall be compelled to give you——" She hesitated, for her emotion was strong, and she dreaded an exhibition of tears. Paul trembled in spite of his confidence in Barbara's story.

"I shall be compelled to give you," said Ruth calmly, after a time, "what you call the greatest happiness of your life." And she laid her hand in his for an instant while their eyes met and exchanged the thoughts too true and sweet for expression. His

face was radiant, and he made no demur when she begged to be excused and withdrew to her own room. God had been very good to her. In the very moment of her resignation to His will He had honored and blessed her beyond belief. The Squire's heart fell when Paul made a formal demand upon him for his daughter.

"I had thought Ruth's idea of marrying was over," said the Squire sadly; "but, if you've made it up between you, I have only to say yes."

Florian easily guessed the relation existing between the two who visited him the next day. Ruth's manner was always so clearly marked in its modesty and reserve that her intimates might soon discover any variation in it. The new hermit accepted the position quietly and without so much as a single reflection on what might have been. He did not look for any surprise on the part of those who came to see him, nor did Ruth manifest any. It was as if he had been there ten years. Paul gave them an opportunity to talk alone.

"I congratulate you," said Florian gravely, "on your present happiness. You are every way deserving of it."

"And I congratulate you on yours," said Ruth. "Our island seems destined to have a tenant always."

She would have wept, had she been alone, at his sadly altered appearance, stooped, pale, hollow-eyed, and the firm lips quivering. But better that way and dearer to God than in the pride of his physical strength and political glory.

"Yes, this is a place for happiness," he said, look-

ing around the homely room. "It healed my father's heart——"

"And it will heal yours," she added for him as he left the thought on his lips unexpressed. He smiled as if she had reproved him.

"I hope so. You have not known all my wickedness, Ruth. I deserted Frances——"

"I know it all, Florian. Do not distress yourself with recounting it. Your reparation will be all the sweeter to her, poor girl."

"How can I make it?" he said humbly. "I have put a shame upon her which only marriage can take away; yet I could not ask her after the wrong I have done."

"Do not think about it at all," said Ruth with emphasis. "Go to her, tell her your sorrow and your resolutions. Her love will find a way through difficulties. Linda would rejoice to see this hour," she added. "Florian, what a time it has all been! What a treasure we missed finding! I cannot forgive myself for not knowing in time."

"I came near missing it altogether," he said in turn. "I was but little disturbed at his discovery and death. What a fate is mine! Had I remained in Clayburgh he would have made himself known to me. Had I even been faithful to God while in the world he would have granted me the favor. Had I *tried* to discover him, and not feared it, I would have found him. Had I been faithful to Frances he would not have died. My ambition, avarice, disloyalty to the faith, and desertion of my promised wife have been paid for by the fact that I am his murderer. I would never have known my

dreadful share in his death had I responded to the feelings which decency and grace prompted in me when I was last on the island after his death. But no ; I went back to evil and thus was I turned from it. May God and my saintly father help me ; but indeed, Ruth, I am a most miserable man !”

His cheeks flushed while he was speaking, and Ruth's tears fell slowly. It was his second outburst of feeling in mortal presence since the night his crime was fixed upon him. He bowed his head upon the table and wept in silence.

“Thank God, as I do, for these tears,” she said. “Yours is a strong nature, Florian, and once turned from the right it would require just such means to bring you back. I am not sorry for your sins, since I see your repentance. Your father cannot regret his sad ending, nor your share in it, when he sees your tears falling into the hand of God. O Florian ! be of good heart ; all your sins are forgiven you.”

It was a haggard face that he presented on rising.

“I know they are forgiven. I am very fortunate. Pardon me for intruding these things on you. It is not a day for tears.”

The sun was shining maliciously on the helpless snow, whose white fingers clung in vain to the spruce trees and the rocks, and with much weeping lost their hold and fell out of sight. Patches of gold color lay along the ice, and big shadows stole around the islands, retreating from the sun. The air and earth sparkled. A soft wind blew from the south in gusts and filled the narrow channels with music. It was not a day for tears, as Florian had said, but the

sight of that lonely grave upon the hill was ever in his eyes and the beauty of the world lay under its shadow. For him the sun rose and set behind it, and beyond it he saw heaven and hell, the eternal truths of religion, and the path that led to heaven. He could not but be a little gloomy, and the presence of men augmented the gloom. His friends parted from him with many kind wishes and hopes for the future. Like his father, he said nothing and watched them until they were out of sight. What was he thinking of? The poet thought it might be of the days when the rights now exercised by another over Ruth belonged to him. The poet was wrong. Florian was wondering if his repentance would bring him the peace of heart which attached to the former hermit of Solitary Island!



## CHAPTER XXV.

### REPARATION.

THE oldest inhabitant of Clayburgh, mindful of that day, years back, when Florian had received a public reception from his townsmen, and particularly moved by the physical and moral grandeur of the man at the time, had he seen the figure which one lone April day walked to the depot, would have been overcome with resentment and shame. Still pale and emaciated, stooped and shambling in his walk, as plainly clothed as a workman, Florian proceeded through the streets of the town as calmly as if it was a custom with him so to do. People stared at the stranger and wondered at his likeness to "their boy," speculated as to who he might be, and were mystified when no one knew him. Florian was more than disguised. It was another person who walked the streets that day on his pilgrimage of reparation.

He took the morning train for New York, buying his ticket with the Squire's startled eyes fixed on him fearfully. Was this a ghost? the Squire asked himself. He did not venture to address the figure, and Florian did not observe him, while the more he looked at the undressed beard and the lean form the less resemblance could he see to his famous boy. The eyes of New Yorkers were not so easily deceived. Passing through the streets to his long-deserted office,

he met a few acquaintances, and all recognized him, offered him their sympathy for the times of which they had heard nothing, and wondered at the odd manner in which he accepted their condolences. Just then he was a political cipher and was not troubled with the presence of old adherents. A paragraph in the paper announced his return to the metropolis, and brought fear and trepidation into the De Ponsonby household, but in no other circle did it create any excitement. No one had any idea that Florian would visit the boarding-house soon after his arrival in the city, and Paul was counting on that supposition to get madame into a reasonable frame of mind. All were surprised when the servant one day laid Florian's card in the mistress' hand, and they heard his name.

"Send him up," said madame, promptly, while Paul rose to go. "No," she continued, "you may remain. This matter is as public as was his engagement. I wish it to be so."

The poet sat down disturbed in mind. Frances was in a state of agony utterly beyond her will to control, but madame never once alluded by word or look to her nervous manner. It was a formidable court before which the penitent presented himself. Yet Florian entered as indifferently as if he were in the lonely island cabin, and, after saluting the three gravely and politely, sat down. His appearance astonished madame greatly, and drew a quickly smothered sob from Frances, but all signs of emotion were presently buried in a dead calm, which grated upon Paul's nerves like saw-sharpening. He was bound by circumstances, and could say nothing and

do nothing to alter the condition of affairs. The battle lay between madame and true love. If Florian suffered from any emotion it was visible only in the long interval which followed his entrance before speaking. Like a true and determined enemy, madame said not a single word while waiting for the parley to begin, until Paul in his hard indignation felt that a battery would not be too much to bring to bear on this feminine obstructor to the natural course of penitence and love.

"I have done you and your daughter a great wrong," Florian said with simple directness, "and I thank you for giving me this opportunity to express my sorrow and ask your pardon. I deserted Miss Lynch for another far beneath her in real worth. It was a heartless act, but at that time I found such acts of mine easily justified. My eyes were opened. I have no words to express my sorrow for what I have done. I hope you will forgive me."

"You were forgiven at that time," said madame gently—so gently that Paul's heart leaped with hope.

"I owe it to you to say," continued Florian, bowing, "that my feelings towards Miss Lynch have never changed. They have only been obscured. I believe sincerely that at one time these feelings your daughter returned. Although she released me from the engagement, I do not think she lost those rights on me which it gave her. I am glad to make the poor restitution of renewing the offer which I once had the honor to make to her. I do it fully conscious of my own unworthiness. I beg of you not to misunderstand my motives."

Madame never hesitated in her reply, although while Florian was speaking she had caught the petitions of three appealing faces, the third being now visible through the half-open door, where Peter was listening, impatient and interested.

"I do not pretend to know your motives," she said calmly, "but your offer we reject for good reasons. It is quite impossible that my daughter should ever again consider marriage with you."

The face of Frances grew pale as death, but her lips were pressed tight in determination. Paul growled and Peter started forward, then drew back. Madame crushed these signs of rebellion by her proud and confident indifference.

"Perhaps it is best," Florian said after a pause. He had received her answer without any surprise, as if he considered it a very proper thing. "There have been many changes in my life which might not be agreeable to you. In no way am I the same as when I first had the honor of proposing for your daughter's hand. I will never again be the same, I trust. I have done all that I know how to do in atoning for a great injury. You have forgiven me. It would be a great pleasure to know that in your opinion I have done all that is possible."

His wistful gaze and simple words disconcerted madame considerably. She was half-convinced that the man was acting, but his motives were hidden, nor could she discover them. There was no adequate motive to explain this masquerade.

"You could not have done more," she answered steadily in a tone that closed the interview. Florian rose and bowed his farewell. A rumor crept through

political circles in the metropolis that Florian was closing up his legal business on the point of retiring to a more congenial field of labor. It was only a rumor, and before it could be verified the great politician had utterly disappeared from the sight of men. A reporter was knocking his door out of shape for an interview at the very moment which saw him approaching Clayburgh on the evening train. Thus the world could always knock at the doors of his heart. Never again would they open to any of its emissaries, and his joy had something fierce in it as he reflected that, God willing, he was entering Clayburgh from the south for the last time. Behind him in the distance his burnt ships were smouldering—his fame, his power, his wealth, his memory, his love! Men would nevermore see them in their proud beauty sail rough seas towards glorious harbors! If they heard of him—and he prayed they would not—it would only be to hear of his conquests over himself; and probably they would wink, and smile, and touch their foreheads knowingly to insinuate his mental weakness, a fact which pleased him greatly and drew a smile from him, as showing how often the world mistook wisdom for folly.

He jumped from the train before it reached the depot, and made his way across the fields to the river. It was now the first week of May and the ice was gone, but the chilly air blew sharply across the water, and the shore resounded under the breakers. He stood on the hill for a moment with his eyes fixed on Linda's resting-place, where the tall monument pierced the sky. His resolution had been to look no more to the past, to leave its sad

reflections in the grave, and to keep his eyes on the future, while his thoughts engaged the present and made what they could out of it. At this moment it was impossible. Back went his recollection to the hour when Linda was in the meridian of her health and beauty, when he was young and full of hope and unstained by sin, when Ruth was his by love's clear title. The intervening years were like a nightmare—ignorance at the beginning, murder at the end, and mystery everywhere. Was he not dreaming now? At a convenient spot along the shore he found a boat, whose he knew not, but used it as if it were his own. It was a long and weary pull against a north wind until he reached the shelter of the channel; longer and wearier across Eel Bay to the anchorage below the cabin; and the night reminded him of that blustering, raw evening when with Ruth he had first set foot on this island. First to the grave and then to the house! He lit the fire and drew the curtain, fondled Izaak Walton, and settling close to the log blaze, felt himself at home. His home! He was cut off from the world at last and forever.

Ruth quickly received word of his return and the events preceding it, and had a long conversation with Père Rougevin touching the new hermit. As a part of a plan which she had conceived, and the Père improved and perfected, the Squire was informed of Florian's presence in Clayburgh.

"Where is he stopping?" said the old man, doubtfully. "What's he doing here at this time of the year? What's he come for?"

"He is living by himself on Solitary Island,"

said Ruth. "For the rest you had better ask himself."

"What!" murmured the Squire, and he said a queer word under his breath, "have you Jesuits got hold of him again?"

"The news came from New York," Ruth replied indifferently; "I know nothing more about it, papa."

"Well, you'll know more after I get back, girl. Living on Solitary Island, hey? I'll blow that island to the—cats. It's more trouble, for a little two-acre mud-hole that it is, than old Grindstone! Does the Père know of this?"

"I told him, papa."

"Of course you did. You and he are always plotting and planning. He's a sneaky Jesuit, and I'll tell him so when I see him. And mark me, Ruth, don't let me hear of you or the priest visiting that boy without my permission. You're both free and independent, but by the shade of McKenzie I'm Sheriff, and I'll make you both feel it if I'm disobeyed."

"We have not the faintest desire, papa," said Ruth meekly, "to see Florian; but we fear he is troubled, and we know that there is no one like his old friend to help him. Unless you permit it, we shall not go near him."

"You're a deep pair," said the distrustful Squire, shaking his leonine head, "but I'm to be ahead of you, anyhow."

What he feared and distrusted he scarcely knew, but he was ready to maintain against all opponents that Florian's proper place at any time was New

York City. Not to be there was, in his eyes, dangerous for so prominent a politician. He shook hands with the hermit on entering the cabin, and sat down in a panic. This was the man who had bought the ticket weeks previous in Clayburgh station, but it surely was not Florian.

"What's happened, Flory?" he asked in a hushed, awed voice.

"I've changed my method of living," said Florian gravely.

"I should think you had," murmured the Squire feebly, "but I don't get the hang of this thing, somehow."

The hermit did not seem to care much for his dazed condition, as he made no effort to relieve it. The Squire shook off a tendency to faint with disgust.

"Flory," said he sternly, "I've sworn by you since you were born, because there was not a year nor an hour of your life that I couldn't put my hand down and say, He's just so. I can't do that now. What's come over you? Why are you here instead of in New York? Who's been bewitching you? What has happened to you? Good God!" cried he in an excess of feeling, standing up to hit the table into fragments with his fist, "tell me something, or I'll think you've been dead and come back to life again."

The crash of the broken furniture sobered him for an instant. Florian looked with slight displeasure at the ruin.

"There is no need of excitement," he said soothingly, and the tone cut the Squire to the heart.



He sat down trembling, almost crying, as a suspicion of Florian's sanity entered his head.

"I *was* dead," continued Florian, "and I came to life again. You are very shrewd, Squire."

He paused, and Pendleton waited long for further information, but none came. The hermit sat gazing into the dying embers of the fire, and at times moved naturally around the cabin, arranging odd articles or brushing them. The Squire stared at him with a feeling, as he said afterwards, that Rev. Mr. Buck was pouring ice-water down his spine.

"I suppose it surprises you, old friend," Florian said, with sudden cordiality, "but I have come here to live for good. You know who lived here before me. I am not better than he, am I? It pleases me to follow him, and I don't think the world has any reason to make a fuss over it."

Pendleton considered this expression of a future policy some moments, and then, reverting to the words, "I am not better than he, am I?" said emphatically:

"Yes, you *air*, Flory, and don't you forget it." Here a pause, while he gathered himself for another burst, and then, "Better than *him*! Why, what was he more than a slave of the Russian Empire—with all respect to him as your father—a fellow that didn't dare call his life his own? And you are an American citizen, a governor, almost, of the greatest State in the Union and a Clayburgh boy. Flory, this looks like insanity. Flory, I don't know what to say to you. I'm groping. Can't you look and talk for one minute as you used to, Flory?"

This appeal made no further impression on the hermit than to illuminate his pallid face with a smile. The Squire made a few more weak attempts upon the hermit's defenses, and then rushed in sudden and overpowering disgust for the door.

"I've got to think," said he, "and I can't do it looking at a corpse."

He did not hear Florian laugh as he banged the door—the first laugh that had passed his lips since the night of Vladimir's revelations. After an hour he returned and resumed his seat with determination written all over him.

"I must know the ins and outs of this thing," he said quietly; "and I'm going to put some questions as the sheriff of Jefferson County. What's to prevent me from jailing you?"

"Nothing," said Florian, "unless the consequence—jailing yourself."

"Now, Flory, be reasonable and answer squarely. Have you thrown up politics for good and all?"

"I have."

"And you are going to live on this island for the next forty years or so?"

"With God's will, yes."

"H'm! that smacks of the Jesuits. What's the reason of all this, Flory? Did you get a pious stroke?"

"I suppose it was that," said Florian, meditating as if a new question had touched his soul.

"Is it in the papist line, lad, somewhat like your father? I hoped you were working away from the Jesuits?"

A faint blush spread over Florian's face.

"I am nearer to the Jesuits than ever, but not as near as I could wish."

"So I thought," said the Squire, shaking his head—"so I thought. And I must say my opinion of the Jesuits is considerably smaller than it was an hour ago."

He reflected a few moments, and saw that Florian's curiosity was aroused.

"Had I been the boss of the Jesuit corporation," said he, aiming eyes and finger at Florian's reason, "I think I could have done a smarter bit of business than has been done in letting you bury yourself out of sight. When you got your pious stroke and came to me to have it utilized, put in the market, so to speak, I'd have thought in this way: 'Here's a man as clever as Webster, a speaker, a wire-puller, a statesman; knows the ins and outs of everything. Here we are, papists without much understanding, with no politicians to speak of on our side; nobody to look after us when the spoils are dividing and the Methodists are gobbling everything; nobody with the ears of the nabobs between his finger and his thumb to tell our story there. Here's a man dying to get such a job.' And I'd give it to you and send you out, if you did nothing less than educate young papists to do as you did, Flory," said the Squire solemnly. "Could you let me have the name or the daguerreotype of the boss Jesuit? I've heard and seen a great many fools in my time, but I put him down as the completest fool that was ever born."

It was an impressive speech and had a meaning which Florian seized upon quickly. The Squire had

sent home like an arrow a thought which had not yet broken upon Florian's mental vision. When he described his speech to Ruth, in fear that he might spoil the effect which he had created, she forbade further visits to the island until the hermit had time to revolve the thought in his mind.

"You know Flory," she said to him—"how when you present him a new idea he thinks and thinks about it until he knows it to the core. Let him think upon it for a week. It was such a very good idea."

"Wasn't it, now?" said the gleeful Squire. "I'd like to present him with one more, and that would fetch him."

It was reserved for Père Rougevin, however, to present the second idea; and as a result of his visit and long talk with Florian Ruth was informed that the time was ripe for her interference. The Squire insisted on accompanying her. Ruth could hear her heart beat as she approached the cabin above the boulder. What would the final result be? They could not keep from Florian the secret of their assault upon his determination to do penance as a solitary. Would the knowledge drive him to obstinacy? She did not yet know the extent of the change which had taken place in him. Florian opened the door for them.

"If your visitors are all as persistent as we are," said she, smiling, "you will not have much of your solitude."

"I fear I am not to have much of it anyway," he replied, in such a tone as made it hard to tell his feelings. "Your father, here, has disturbed me on that point, and Père Rougevin has almost settled it

that I shall go out into the world and be a hermit there."

"The best thing the Père ever did in his life," said the Squire.

"Which would be very hard for you, Florian," said Ruth, with a gentle sympathy that woke him at once, while the Squire was resolved into a thunder-cloud at this treachery.

"Ruth, you tell me what to do," Florian said humbly, and submissively.

"It is easy enough to endure this solitude," she continued; "it may be beautiful to certain natures. But to be alone in the busy world is very trying. Of course duty makes the hard things easy and sweet. That would be your only consolation, Florian."

"It is this way with me, Ruth," he began eagerly, and making no account of the Squire: "I have learned to love this place, this life, as I never loved anything in this world. You know why. And what I was is such a horror and shame to me that to return to its scenes is like death. Yet it seems to me and to your father, and to the Père that I ought not throw aside a power which could certainly be used for the general good, merely to satisfy myself."

"And you ought not, that is true——"

"That's what *I* maintain—that's what *I've* maintained all along!" shouted the Squire. "Flory, if you do otherwise you must write your name beside the boss Jesuit's."

"Now, papa!" said Ruth, "going the boiling volcano down to a harmless summer. "You ought not, Florian, if there would be no danger to your-

self in holding a power which was to you so strong a temptation."

"I would take and hold it under protest," he replied confidently. "I value it no more than a straw. I cannot disguise from myself that hereafter I can but despise it. O Ruth! is there no middle course? Yet why do I ask? I have set myself to do that which is hardest. Let me take the worst with joy."

Ruth's face kindled into enthusiasm.

"Well, there is a middle course," she said, triumphantly. "You can remain in your solitude and yet retain your interest in the world."

Both gentlemen uttered exclamations of delight or rage, and turned upon her—the hermit, hopefully, the Squire in despair.

"Have you forgotten Frances?" she said.

"No," and he drew away as if hurt. "She has justly forgotten me. I saw her. It is all over."

"You saw her mother, Florian. If you had seen herself you would not have been in trouble long. It is *not* all over. That dear girl is as faithful to you as if you never wronged her. She let her mother speak first, as obedience required; and she was silent, as became her modesty. But she never lost faith in you when we all trembled, and she loves you still."

This picture of feminine devotion drew the tears to Ruth's eyes.

"Then, besides, you were half-glad the test of coming here to live was not to be laid before her. She would have followed you to a tent, you foolish fellow. Florian, where are your wits? See that hill yonder? Build there a pretty villa, and bring

Frances to preside over it. There is no reason why a great politician should not live among the islands and rule from this solitude. You need not practice law. And so your temptations are minimized, your influence is preserved, and your solitude is saved to you."

It was a sight to see the Squire's face glow as Ruth reached her climax, and when the last word was uttered he gave a cheer that rattled the loose articles in the room.

"You can think over it," said she, seeing that the Squire's emotion jarred upon him. "These things cannot be done hastily. "If it be God's will that you stay here——"

"More Jesuitism!" growled the Squire.

"You must do so. If duty points another road to you, my advice will occur to you as an easy way out of the difficulty. You will not forget Frances?" she added wistfully.

"I can never forget her," he replied. "I thank you for your visit, Ruth. In a little while I can decide, if I have not already decided. Squire, not another word, or I stay here forever."

Pendleton saw dimly that few words and a speedy departure were two important points in Ruth's programme, and for a wonder he tucked his daughter under his arm and, with a brief farewell, led her down to the boat.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### TRUE HEARTS.

CLAYBURGH was "completely upsoot," as a native expressed it, by the publication of the banns of marriage between Paul Rossiter and Ruth Pendleton. It had "reckoned" on her remaining an old maid; it "admired" what the Squire would do now; it "swowed" its astonishment over and over for two weeks, at the end of which time the marriage was accomplished in white satin and tulle, and a great part of the town assisted in the festivities. Parker C. Lynch, as Peter Carter was now known, was ex-officio the master of the feast. In full morning-dress, gloved and collared to perfection, this erratic representative of the bluest blood of Ireland was a fine-looking gentleman on the model of an English squire, and, when he posed or walked under the wide eyes of the assembly, showed that he had not forgotten his earlier training. The Squire could not restrain his astonishment or refuse his admiration. In his suit of armor he was as stiff as a post; growled and swore secretly at intervals and looked anxiously for the opportunity to steal away and disrobe.

"Where did you get the knack of wearing this confounded rig?" said he to Peter. "Can you see



those tails of mine? I feel like a swallow. I don't know what minute I am going to fly."

"You're a ground-swallow," replied Peter, with a grin, and a drinking gesture. "Ye're cavernous, Squire. Faith ye look well for an old country buck that knows so little, and ye carry the odd garment neatly."

"How do you manage to do it?" said the Squire awe-stricken.

"It was born there," Peter said—"the coat I mean. I had it on when I was born. D'ye notice the shape of my legs? Ye can never wear a swallow-tail unless you are shaped so."

The Squire looked down mournfully at a fearful waste of thighbone and flesh on his particular person.

"I must look awful," said he sadly. "Couldn't we get away, Peter, and get rid of these togs?"

Not the least distinguished of the guests was Mrs. Buck and her minister, as faultless in costume as of old. The good lady had been somewhat left in the shade since the discovery of Florian's real parentage, and her vanity had received a deep wound in being cut off so roughly from her famous brother. Mr. Buck alone could have told her severe disappointment at not having been the Princess Linda, and her ravings over the possibility of Mrs. Winifred having put Linda in her place. These weaknesses Sara kept from the world prudently. She was now quite a mother in Israel. Five blooming and clever children clung on occasions to her voluminous skirts, and her matronly figure, with its still coquettish movements, was almost charming. Her faith was

wholly dead. She never was troubled with a single longing for the truths on which she had been fed, nor with a single scruple as to her apostasy. In being liberal enough to consider Catholics on a par with Episcopalians and in despising the sects she considered herself doctrinally safe. She seized upon the Squire at a most critical moment. Peter had just winked at him knowingly and then disappeared into the upper rooms.

"Aren't you happy, Squire?" buzzed Sara in his ears. "Who would have thought, knowing, as we do, all that has happened, that this day would ever have come? Who is Mr. Rossiter? Such a fascinating man! How is it that he wasn't gobbled up by a handsomer woman than our Ruth?"

"Because in New York, where there aren't any women," said the sarcastic Squire, "he didn't see any one handsomer. If he had come to Clayburgh first, where the women are as thick as sardines, Ruth wouldn't have had a chance."

The two old gentlemen finally made themselves comfortable in the kitchen attic, as became barbarians fond of undress uniforms, cards, and punch. Once the Squire felt a mystery in the air, and expostulated with Ruth.

"Why isn't Flory here?" he asked.

"The man with the gizzard," said Peter.

"Give him time," replied Ruth. "These great men don't come and go as we common people do."

"Common people! I'm sheriff of the county!"

"And I represent the *Tribune*," said Peter.

"Don't be quarrelsome. When Florian comes you shall see and hear him."

"What's all this running about for?"

"Now, Papa, go away and be reasonable or I shall punish you."

"Gimme my punishment now," urged the Squire, and, after pulling his whiskers, she dismissed him with a kiss. At twilight the guests were gone, and the Squire and Peter were peacefully sleeping off the effects of the day's excitement. The poet and his bride stood together on the veranda, facing the calm waters of the river, her head resting on his shoulder and her deep eyes watching the stars in the cool, far-reaching sky.

"It is all over," she sighed, occasionally—"all over. One effect of a steady life in these old villages is peculiar. The years seem as days. I am not ten days older in thought than when Linda used to come down that road—O my dear little princess!—waving her hands and singing to me a long way off. All the nights like these seem as one, there have been so many of them."

"And there are to be so many of them," said the poet.

"Let us hope so, dear," said she. "With all the suffering and uncertainty in the past there has been more beauty in it than ugliness, more good than evil. Even poor Florian will find certain and unexpected rest to-night."

"There are two figures coming down the road, Ruth. It is time for Florian to be here."

"Do you meet them, and then send Florian up to the parlor," said she. "Tell him I would like to see him."

Père Rougevin and Florian came up the steps to-

gether, and the politician congratulated the poet where he stood. The three gentlemen seemed to be in perfect accord, and at ease with one another. Florian proceeded alone to the apartment where Ruth, all aglow with delight, awaited him.

"Accept my best wishes for your future happiness," said he; "the present is all your own."

She looked at him with satisfaction. His dress was the usual neat-fitting citizen's costume, his hair had been cut and his beard trimmed. Florian, subdued and pale, was very much himself again.

"I conclude from your appearance," said Ruth, "that conscience has again decided against a solitary life for you."

"It is settled," he said, "that I am still to remain in the political world—most of the time here; as it may need in New York."

"You are very sad over it. Have you forgotten my *via media*? I flattered myself you would act on that immediately."

"How gladly would I, if it rested only with myself! But, Ruth, put yourself in my place. You know the motive I had in deserting Frances. I have no courage that would send me to the feet of one I have so wronged to ask a great favor."

"How is it ever to be done?" said Ruth. "Frances has forgiven you, will have no other but you, waits for you, weeps for you. She is not bold enough, and you are excessively humble. This will never do. There should be no go-betweens, yet I cannot see how it is to be avoided if you will not speak for yourself."

He was silent for a few moments.

"It would be a great happiness for me," he said, "to have the support and sympathy of one so tenderly loved. Yet you know her bringing up. You see the life that awaits me and those who attach themselves to my fortunes. How can I ask her to banish herself to Solitary Island?"

"It might be hard enough, but heartache and luxury are not always preferable to a handsome villa and content on the island."

"You leave me no way of escape," he said.

"I am laying a snare for you. Do you know that I have been over-bold? I wrote to your Frances. I told her everything as I knew it. I asked her if the past could not be mended in the only way that it could be. She wrote to me a very brief letter! What do you think it said?"

He waited for her to answer her own question. "Read it," she said placing it in his hands. It contained but a single sentence.

"Tell him he may come."

"Thank God," said Florian with a sigh.

"You are a happy man, Florian."

"And I owe so much of it to you, Ruth," he replied gratefully.

They went out on the veranda, where the priest and Paul sat talking. Both gentlemen shook hands with him in silence, and the conversation drifted into commonplace matters. The marble shaft bearing Linda's name was visible from the house. The calm waters of the river lay placid in the moonlight. It was an hour of great rest for these four persons, whose saddest memories were connected with the scene before them. Although they were full of joy

at the happy ending of so many difficulties, the remembrance of what had happened chastened that joy severely, and, if they saw before them a pleasant future, it was made so only by the hope that, no matter what fortune befell them, God would never permit them to wander from His fold. Life is hard enough, and death bitter, but when sin takes hold of both there is no sorrow can surpass them.

THE END.